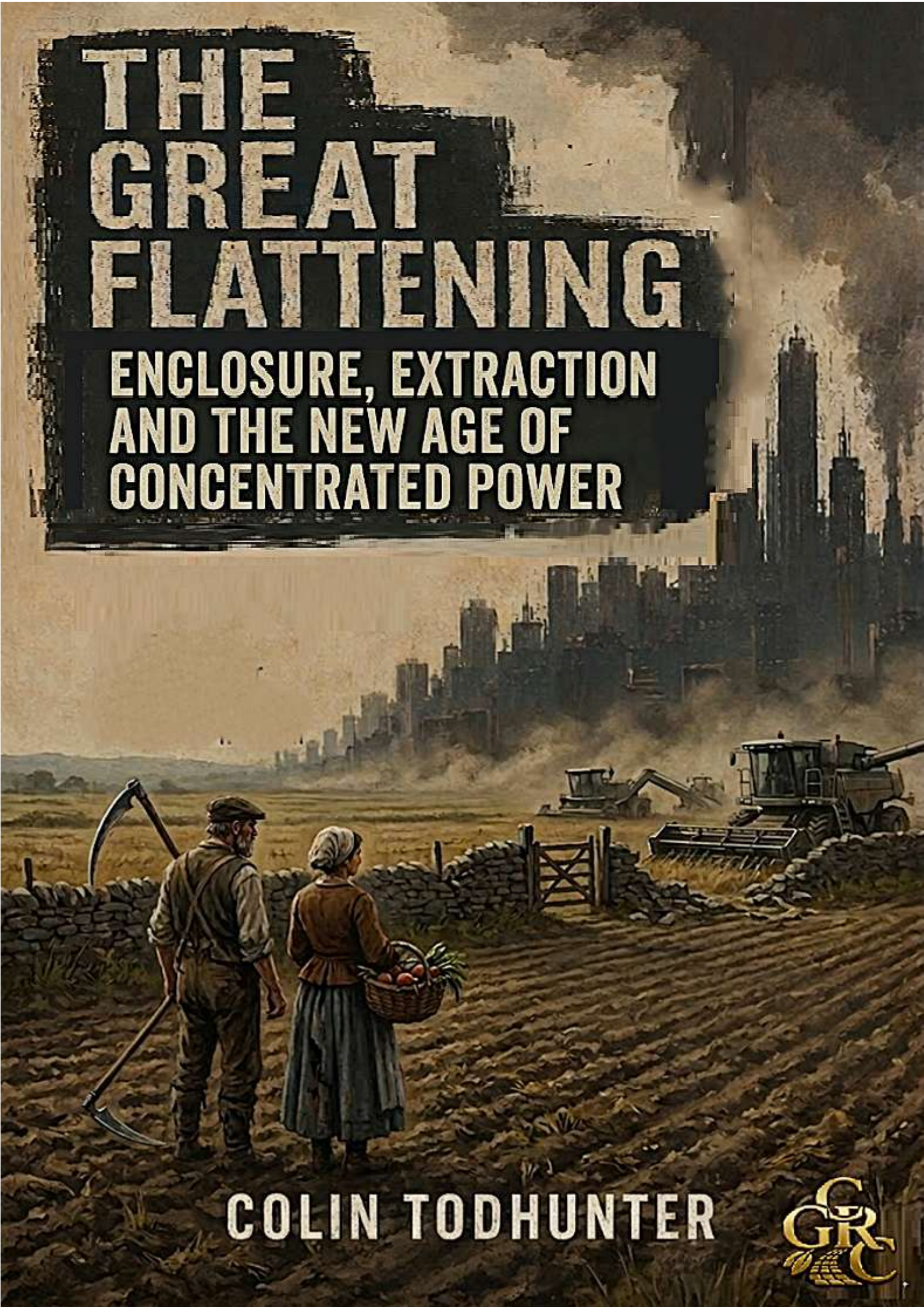
THE GREAT FLATTENING

ENCLOSURE, EXTRACTION AND THE NEW AGE OF CONCENTRATED POWER



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Books

Food, Dependency and Dispossession: Resisting the New World Order (2022)

Sickening Profits: The Global Food System's Poisoned Food and Toxic Wealth (2023)

Power Play: The Future of Food (2024)

The Agrarian Imagination: Development and the Art of the Impossible (2025)

India's Farmers Against the Global Agri-Cartel: Chronicling Resistance to Corporate Enclosures (2026)

These open-access books are available via the following link and provide additional insights into many of the issues presented in this new book.

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To defend the lane is to
defend the seed

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Introduction

This collection of essays is part of a series of open-access e-books by the author. The books are listed above in the 'About the Author' section and can be accessed at https://figshare.com/authors/Colin_Todhunter/21220973.

Readers are encouraged to consult those books to deepen their understanding of the issues, themes and analyses set out in this current collection. They are all based on original analyses, translated into accessible publications for broad public reach and are released under an open access framework and freely available for non-commercial use.

What do the decline of regional British cheeses, the sanitisation of Amsterdam's streets, 'precision farming' and the rise of digital 'smart city' surveillance have in common?

As we travel from the Netherlands to the Teifi Valley in Wales and the back lanes of Chennai, this book will reveal the answer to that question. Along the way, we will take side trips to listen to whispering soil and silent streets while contemplating the 'convenience' of digital dispossession.

But this is not some kind of surreal travelogue. This book rests firmly within the domain of resistance literature. It does not sit on the fence.

It is not written to persuade the unconvinced. It is written for those who already feel the world narrowing and require some insight into what is happening. The book defends the sacred, the messy and the unpredictable. It defends elements of human life that commodification and enclosure cannot fully extinguish.

This book comprises a set of standalone essays. Although each chapter can be read independently, together they form a wider map of contemporary political, ecological and economic transformation. That means any repetition within the text reflects the recurrence of an underlying trend across different aspects of life.

Urban and agricultural landscapes are undergoing profound changes, largely driven by the imperatives of capitalism, a system that must expand,

absorb and convert life into value in order to survive. Technology does not in itself drive this process. It is scaled and optimised as an instrument of enclosure and control.

Historically, enclosure was a local act of fencing off common land, but it has evolved into a global project of 'flattening' life by systematically stripping away culture, physical territory and the biological foundations of life (from seeds to our own bodies) to turn them into standardised, corporate-managed assets. Very often, enclosure is not physical; it can be informational, economic and infrastructural rather than spatial.

The transformations described in this book are not the outcome of a single coordinated plan or conspiracy. Pressures and incentives shape how institutions and individuals act. The ability to act (agency) exists but is constrained and uneven, and it operates within limits set by the need for capital to accumulate.

The book documents how this logic operates across both the city and the countryside.

In the fields, industrial agriculture dismantles ecological complexity and replaces it with systems of dependency. Diverse landscapes are converted into standardised production units governed by patented seeds, synthetic inputs and data-driven management. Relationships of reciprocity between people, soil and seed are broken and reorganised to benefit global supply chains.

At the same time, cities are being reconfigured. Urban life is increasingly shaped in a way that prioritises predictability and commercial throughput. Informal economies are displaced, and public spaces are re-engineered. Street life is reorganised into monitored, optimised environments designed for control and profit.

These changes often appear under the banner of ‘development’, while enclosure is presented as ‘innovation’. Meanwhile, the erosion of autonomy is reframed as ‘convenience’ and ‘progress’.

However, not everything or everyone fully submits to what is described above. They survive, protest and refuse total absorption. They challenge the

narrative of inevitability. That is because what is presented as necessary is, in fact, a manufactured reality and therefore one that can be unmade.

The book makes a key claim: the transformation of farming and the transformation of cities that we currently see are not separate processes. Moreover, what we are witnessing is a profound civilisation crisis that strikes at the very heart of what it means to be human. And it is sustained by physical barriers as well as a psychological 'structural fence' of propaganda that internalises enclosure as necessary, natural or inevitable within the individual mind.

Chapter One

Bulldozed!

Similar patterns of control and enclosure are appearing across different areas of life, from cities and farming to small businesses and daily transactions.

For much of humanity's existence, our traditional worldview or cosmos was based on sacred, reciprocal relationships with the land and governed by natural seasons and localised community rhythms. What is being seen is an accelerated shift from a physical universe rooted in seasons and community to a virtual one facilitated by screens and platforms.

In this emerging system, experience is mediated by mobile apps and predictive algorithms that convert actions into data points. At the same time, spontaneous 'messy' human interaction is engineered away in favour of a sterile, predictable environment. This system encloses both urban and rural life, replacing the sacred and reciprocal relationships between humans and the land with a computational universe where creativity is harnessed to serve corporate extraction.

The changing city: Amsterdam

Change is inevitable. But how much change occurs and who drives the changes in society is another question. Take the Amsterdam of the 1970s and 80s, for instance. It was a bit seedier, rawer, more unpolished and more spontaneous. It seems much less so today. Cash has been pushed to the periphery, with most transactions now digital and monitored. Mass tourism has led to a more sanitised environment. And a previous spirit of spontaneity on the street appears dampened.

The transformation of Amsterdam from the gritty, countercultural epicentre of the 1970s and 80s to the polished, hyper-managed city of today can be viewed as a case study in the tension between radical social

experimentation and the pressures of global capitalism. The decline of the raw Amsterdam and the rise of the current more sanitised version emerged from a shift in urban governance and economic strategy.

The late 60s—notably the Provo movement, a shortened form of *provoceren* (to provoke)—bequeathed to Amsterdam a culture of dissent and anti-authoritarianism. This spirit fuelled the squatting movement (*kraakbeweging*) of the 70s and 80s. Squatting was a political project.

By occupying derelict buildings, squatters created autonomous zones that bypassed the market. These spaces acted as incubators for the art, music and social spontaneity that defined the city's unpolished character.

The state eventually viewed these autonomous zones as threats to public order and private property. The late 70s and early 80s were marked by intense, often violent, clashes between police and squatters (the *kroningsoproer* or Coronation Riots of 1980 are a prime example).

The authorities gradually shifted from a hands-off approach to one of rigorous legal containment. New laws, culminating in the criminalisation of squatting, effectively dismantled the physical infrastructure that allowed raw countercultural life to thrive.

While the heroin crisis of the 70s and 80s hit Amsterdam hard, it also provided the state with the necessary justification to ramp up policing and surveillance. Unpolished street life became synonymous in the public imagination with danger and decay. The subsequent 'cleanup' of the city centre was the beginning of the end for spontaneous street culture.

In the earlier decades, the city's cultural energy was organic and self-generated. It wasn't planned by urban developers but emerged from the spaces the authorities had either lost control of or ignored.

Aside from residences, squats were DIY art galleries, experimental theatres and underground venues. The legacy of the 60s meant that being an artist often meant being an activist. There was an inherent link between the raw state of the city and the raw art it produced. Because rent was low or non-existent in the margins, artists could afford to take risks and experiment without needing commercial viability.

The scenes outside Amsterdam Central Station back then, with musicians playing without permits, was a manifestation of a city where the streets belonged to the public. It was a chaotic, bottom-up vibrancy.

Today, that vibrancy has been largely replaced by professionalised, commercial and perhaps temporary cultural outputs often designed for a global audience. Much of this is now curated through city-sanctioned events, designated nightlife zones and high-end museums. It is 'professional' and 'accessible', but it lacks the unpolished soul that came from the lack of oversight.

The spaces that once housed artists and countercultural collectives are now high-end residential apartments, luxury hotels or concept stores.

Modern 'vibrancy' is often packaged. Where once you had a spontaneous band, you now have a 'street theatre festival' with a budget and an itinerary. This is 'safer' for tourism, but it effectively kills the serendipity that defined the older, rawer Amsterdam.

Back in the day, people with guitars and amps pitched up outside Amsterdam Central Station. In the 80s, the station area was a more chaotic, organic public space. Today, it is a transit-oriented highly managed hub optimised for throughput and tourism. Street performers now require permits and are often regulated to specific zones.

The disappearance of cash and the rise of digital tracking reflect a transition toward a 'smart city' model, where unpredictability is viewed as a threat to social order and systemic inefficiency rather than a cultural virtue.

The shift to a tourism-heavy economy necessitated this change. To attract high-spending international tourists and real estate investments, the city rebranded itself as a safe, clean and predictable destination. The gritty, unpredictable nature of the 70s was seen as an obstacle to this economic pivot.

Universal cities

What was once a city of spontaneity is becoming a laboratory of control. But this is not unique to Amsterdam. The same can be said about many modern cities.

While the centre of Amsterdam retains its traditional architectural sparkle, universal steel, glass and concrete multi-storey structures are making their mark, especially on the sprawling outskirts but also in and around the centre.

On the surface, the creeping homogenisation of the global urban landscape (*Starbucksidation*) is about glass façades, 'placeless' spaces and corporate signage. From new-build residential projects in Amsterdam Noord to commercial real estate in Toronto or Bangalore, everything seems to increasingly resemble the sterility of an airport terminal—impersonal and contactless.

This universal architecture is a blend of functionalism and brute-force scale. It strips away the ornamentation of traditional architecture, replacing it with the sterile, 'frictionless' surfaces of glass and steel designed for 'efficiency'.

But this functionalist veneer disguises a monolithic brutalism of scale—massive structures that communicate power by literally and figuratively towering over the human-scale vitality of the street. Unlike the idealistic modernism of the past, this is a postmodernism of branding: a uniform, placeless aesthetic that reduces the rich, localised identity of a city to a blandness, paving the way for corporate logos to be projected to tell us that we are in a place of 'progress', while we are actually in a smart-city space of total state-corporate enclosure.

Zoning in Chennai, India

Despite their importance, street hawkers face numerous challenges. The Greater Chennai Corporation has been working on designating specific vending zones to regulate street vending and improve conditions for both vendors and customers. This is something we see happening across the globe. However, like elsewhere, this initiative has sparked concerns among hawkers who fear losing their established customer bases if relocated. Many have been operating in their neighbourhoods for years, creating a loyal clientele that may not follow them to new locations. The recent push for organised vending zones supposedly aims to address issues such as traffic congestion and pedestrian safety while ensuring that street vendors can operate legally and hygienically. Again, an argument used in many countries to clear out street hawkers and vendors from certain public spaces. Many hawkers express anxiety about being pushed out of their traditional selling spots, which could jeopardise their businesses and disrupt longstanding community dynamics.

However, this visible architecture is symbolic of a system that converts land, places, spaces, labour, food and data into manageable units of profit and control. It dismantles the decentralised, the sacred and the sovereign and replaces them with a uniform reality calibrated for extraction.

In this context, the sacred is a reciprocal, spiritual relationship between humans, the land and the cosmos—a concept embodied by the dharmic principle that individual actions are inextricably tied to the wellbeing of the whole. The sacred is found in the traditional rhythms of life being eroded by a (post-)industrial capitalism defined by a cold, calculated rationale of instrumentalism.

The spiritual is not necessarily confined to formal religious institutions. It is tied to everyday practices, rituals and cultural continuities that provide people with a sense of identity, strength and community. These essential human dimensions help individuals maintain a sense of self and social cohesion, framing labour not as alienated toil but as a devotional engagement with life's cycles.

In effect, the spiritual is the recognition that we are part of a greater whole; our thoughts and actions have consequences that ripple far beyond the immediate, material and visible, giving existence ultimate value.

Both the sacred and the spiritual are lived realities. They represent the endurance of human culture and community-based resilience against systems that would otherwise reduce people to mere consumers or cogs in a global economic machine.

In the traditional urbanism of the Global South, the tight-knit lane, with its markets, shrines and workshops, embodies a rhythm of life that, to an extent, often operates beyond state or corporate control. These winding 'messy' spaces host informal economies where trade is often untaxed and unmapped and where religion and ritual intertwine with everyday commerce and life. What appears 'messy' to modern planners is, in fact, a living system of decentralised resilience.

But what we are seeing is a move towards the universal city. A city that is zoned, monitored, predictable and 'safe' and is designed to host global brands. For planners, this space becomes stripped of its soul and is

branded as ‘progress’ and ‘development’, an aesthetic preference that symbolises the status of modernity. Dig a little deeper, however, and it is ultimately a structural requirement of global capital.

Zoning, eviction and gentrification transform the lane’s autonomous vitality into the controlled, bland environment of the corporate plaza. The street market, for instance, once the urban outlet for rural producers, is displaced by standardised chain retail hubs sustained by the global agribusiness supply chain.

Consider the *kirana* store—a small, family-owned neighbourhood retail shop that serves as the backbone of local life in cities like Chennai in India. Unlike the sterile, frictionless surfaces of the corporate plaza, a *kirana* store is a space where commerce is inseparable from culture.

For example, the presence of ritual objects like conch shells and limes hanging outside is not merely 'tradition' but a visual assertion of the spiritual sovereignty described earlier. These items—associated with deities like Vishnu—signify that the shopkeeper views their work as *seva* (service) and their trade as a dharmic act, rather than a mere transactional exercise in profit maximisation.

But we see the rise of quick-commerce platforms. This is not just a technological shift. It represents the urban enclosure of these sacred spaces. By using aggressive discounting and predatory logistics to drive out the small-scale retailer, these platforms replace a relationship-based, spiritual economy with a data-driven, transactional one.

While some *kirana* stores are trying to adapt by embracing digital technologies, using WhatsApp for orders and implementing online billing systems, there are calls in India for the implementation of a minimum sales price to prevent aggressive discounting by quick commerce platforms.

The spatial enclosure of the city mirrors the enclosure of the countryside where farmers lose their right to seed, soil and price autonomy. The universal city is simply the urban face of a universal countryside. Both are redesigned so that land, labour and life can be rendered into data and debt, the ultimate enclosure of dependency. Payments, movement through

transport systems, online purchases and even health records are captured, stored and monetised within interconnected digital platforms.

The same enclosure of spontaneity we see in the transformation of Amsterdam's street culture is the blueprint for the enclosure of the rural landscape—where local seed sovereignty is replaced by the sterile predictability of agritech data centres.

The gleaming mall in Delhi and the agritech data centre in Hyderabad are two faces of the same operation: the concentration of sovereignty within corporate systems. The most obvious examples are the cameras monitoring our every move on the street and in the mall to the cloud-based systems of Microsoft or Bayer designed to manage, predict and control every aspect of the farm and the farmer.

The rhetoric of 'development' tries to convince people that the replacement of small marketplaces or the traditional high street by supermarkets and malls is progress, just like the replacement of agricultural diversity by patented seed monoculture is passed off by Bayer as the 'modernisation' of agriculture. Yet this great lie conceals dependence on outside inputs and infrastructural systems owned elsewhere.

At the heart of the system lies a digital brain. Just as big agritech platforms harvest data from the farmer, the soil and the seed, urban infrastructures harvest the data of citizens as they move through the city landscape and exchange. Cashless systems, sensors, facial recognition cameras, biometrics and predictive algorithms turn citizens into consumers who become data points within a managed economy.

It is increasingly the case of that which cannot be measured is a disorder to be removed. Informal exchange, local customs or sacred practice are marked as inefficiency or disorder to be engineered away.

The smart city and smart agriculture

Officialdom tends to define a smart city in glowing terms: an urban area that leverages Internet of Things (IoT) sensors, data analytics and information technology to optimise city services, improve infrastructure efficiency and enhance the overall quality of life for its residents.

A smart city, however, can also be regarded as a high-tech urban experiment in enclosure that prioritises corporate data harvesting and surveillance infrastructure under the guise of efficiency, as seen in systems such as networked CCTV, biometric ID-linked services and app-based mobility platforms that track movement and behaviour in real time. Corporate data harvesting and expensive surveillance infrastructure are prioritised under the guise of efficiency, trading resident privacy for a polished, algorithmically managed facade.

This critical stance sees the logic of the smart city in terms of a world where humanity is reduced to a calculated formula of control and efficiency. If we are stripped of our chaos, our intuition and our spontaneity, we may no longer be human.

As with the smart city, there is an official narrative that characterises smart agriculture: a data-driven farming approach that integrates GPS, IoT sensors and automated machinery to micro-manage crop health and resource inputs, theoretically maximising yields while reducing waste.

Smart agriculture may also be viewed as a high-tech digital enclosure of the farm, where growers become dependent on proprietary software ecosystems—GPS-guided machinery, sensor-driven irrigation systems and subscription-based farm management platforms that collect and process field-level data, effectively turning farmers into data-entry points for global tech giants who own the resulting agricultural insights.

Smart cities and smart agriculture are ultimately a metaphysical project because the concept of ‘smart’ replaces a world shaped by ritual, season and mystery with a computational universe.

Soviet filmmaker Alexander Dovzhenko and Kentucky farmer-poet Wendell Berry both capture a living cosmos of land and community that the modern world has lost and which smart agriculture tends to erase.

In Port William (1977), Berry honours farmers trading seeds they have grown themselves, free of corporate enclosure. This is the authentic, increasingly bulldozed by smart agriculture’s control grid and the smart city’s metrics and malls.

While Berry is quite well known in the West, it is worth saying a few words about Dovzhenko's silent film Earth (1930). The film opens and closes with sweeping, almost worshipful shots of Ukrainian wheat fields and orchards. The land is portrayed as a living entity, fertile and abundant. Dovzhenko focuses on the cycles of life and death, portraying the death of an old farmer as a peaceful return to the soil, surrounded by ripe fruit.

While the film supports collectivisation, its heart lies in the communal spirit of the villagers, encapsulated by shared labour, singing and the collective mourning of Vasyl, the old farmer referred to above.

The film is noted for its slow pacing and emphasis on visual poetry. It captures the rhythms of nature—seasonal changes, wind in the wheat, the slow ripening of fruit—as a spiritual force that binds humanity to the cosmos.

The traditional lane, village or market is a place to assert our freedom precisely because it is unmapped, unpredictable and 'inefficient'. And these locations integrate the sacred with the everyday: a roadside shrine, a banyan tree or a conch shell hanging outside a kirana store in India.

But universal architecture and infrastructure tend to require a blank slate on which they can inscribe their logos and networks. Capital erases community and

The Financial Logic of Enclosure

The processes described here must be situated within a broader political-economic framework. The restructuring of economies through trade liberalisation, privatisation and financial integration—often under the guidance of institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO—has consistently facilitated dispossession while opening new avenues for capital accumulation. Enclosure is one of the primary mechanisms through which these dynamics are realised. The transition to a computational universe is a survival strategy for a collapsing financial system. The global elite have sought a 'Great Reset'. This involves the financialisation of nature, which creates new markets for carbon and 'green' infrastructure, visible in carbon credit trading schemes, biodiversity offset markets and ESG-linked investment frameworks that turn ecological processes into financial assets. This 'one world agriculture' agenda, promoted by the likes of the Gates Foundation and the WEF, envisions a 'food transition' that replaces sovereign farmers with AI-driven, farmerless farms and laboratory-engineered food. This vision culminates in a world where individuals are chipped and connected, their genetic and health data harvested by algorithms to dictate their consumption. This is the ultimate enclosure: the conversion of life itself into data. Against this stands the only viable alternative: food sovereignty based on agroecological principles and the decentralised resilience of the family farm and the local lane.

tradition and reinvents the landscape so that property can be branded and monetised.

The same principle governs the global food system: a few corporations increasingly dictate what seeds are grown and what transactions are visible. The smart city is the urban endpoint of that chain, a controlled consumption zone fed by a controlled production landscape.

Both farmer and citizen become dependents of a system increasingly too integrated to defy.

The *Starbucksed* city doesn't just look empty but feels empty. It is a sensory desert that can dull the mind and homogenise thought and being. By replacing 'messy', vibrant streets and lanes with sterile glass and steel, this architecture forces us into a state of permanent displacement.

We increasingly reside in non-places where we are never truly home. The sheer scale of these corporate spaces can smother the local, making human connection feel superficial and rootless and traditional rhythms feel obsolete.

The universal city is the final enclosure. It mirrors uniform patented seeds and soil stripped of its natural vitality due to corporate-led cropping patterns. The same logic that binds the farmer to loans and debt now binds the citizen to data. We see corporate-led systems planted in environments of control and surveillance, branded as smart cities and smart agriculture.

What is being dismantled is a cosmic order that sustained human life for millennia. The rhythms of face-to-face reciprocity, the sanctity of the seed, the moral economy of the lane—these were the foundations of civilisation.

The smart city, like the agritech platform, is a corporate-designed cosmology. It denies the sacred and the unpredictable pulse of life. It replaces the world with a simulation of the world, a managed reality where nothing exists unless it can be indexed and owned.

To defend the lane is to defend the seed. This is not nostalgia. It is the last line of resistance against a system which tends to erode the conditions that make humanity possible.

In finishing, it is essential to acknowledge that technology is not inherently 'malicious'. The issue is not the technology itself but the logic of enclosure that governs its deployment.

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Chapter Two

Silent Quay

In the Cornish coastal village of Polperro during the 1950s and 1960s and into the 70s, the smell of the harbour carried fish in different states of decay and preparation on the quayside.

It moved through alleys, up stone steps and into doorways, settling briefly before shifting again with air and movement. It mixed with rope and wet timber and with the residue of earlier work embedded in surfaces. The harbour remained active in a continuous sense, shaped by tides, labour and the timing of return.

Across coastal villages in England and elsewhere, similar conditions held over long periods. Harbours worked as points of contact between sea and settlement, where catching, gutting, mending, sorting and selling took place in close proximity. Activity overlapped across the day and across spaces, remaining widely visible to those living nearby.

Fishing villages formed part of wider systems, but they were not detached from them. Agriculture inland and fishing offshore connected through exchange that remained materially grounded. Goods moved outwards along established routes, while knowledge, labour and decision-making stayed close to the place itself.

The boundary between work and environment remained thin. Weather set the terms of action and required constant adjustment. Skill developed over time through repetition and shared experience rather than formal instruction.

Life was hard and often uncertain. Income shifted with the catch and with access to markets. Storms could remove equipment, delay return or prevent departure. Within this uncertainty, there remained a degree of control rooted in familiarity with conditions.

People understood the environments they worked within through direct engagement over time. Production and survival remained grounded in place, even when outcomes were unpredictable.

These were systems with short distances between cause and effect. A change in tide or wind, or a poor catch over several days, had immediate consequences that could not be deferred. Adjustment followed quickly, sometimes within hours. Decisions and outcomes remained closely linked.

That condition has largely disappeared, though traces of it remain in form and memory.

Visiting this type of village now produces a different experience. The harbour is still there. The walls, the slips and the narrow streets remain in place and in use. But the density of activity has thinned over time, and the sensory range has narrowed in ways that are gradual but noticeable. What remains is managed, often carefully and deliberately.

The buildings and spaces are maintained through ongoing repair and regulation, but the functions that once filled them have been reduced in number or shifted elsewhere. The village appears continuous because change has been uneven and selective. Elements that support its current role are maintained, while others recede through disuse or quiet removal.

Transformation

This transformation does not happen all at once. It has followed a sequence that can be traced across many places and villages, even where local conditions differ.

The first stage involves outside attention. From the late nineteenth century onwards, coastal villages began to attract painters, writers and visitors in increasing numbers. They were drawn to steep streets, tight harbours and irregular building lines. These places began to circulate more widely as images, reproduced and shared beyond their immediate context.

This attention does more than record what is already there by starting to favour certain features over others. Disorder is recast as character, and wear is taken as evidence of age and tradition. The village comes to be

understood through how it appears to those arriving from outside, often with limited knowledge of how it functions.

At this stage, work continues. Boats still go out regularly, and fish are landed, sorted and processed. Activity begins to take on an additional role over time. It is watched as well as carried out and becomes part of what draws people to the place.

For a period, these conditions exist alongside each other. Work continues while visitors observe, sometimes at close range. The balance between these activities becomes harder to maintain as numbers increase and expectations settle.

Gradually, the presence of visitors begins to influence what remains in view and what is moved or reduced. Activities that fit expectations continue without interruption. Others—noise, waste, certain forms of expansion or mechanisation—are restricted, relocated or phased out over time.

We also see this in belief systems. In Polperro, for instance, the transition from genuine belief in piskies (pixies) to their current status as shiny souvenirs and fridge magnets followed the village's shift from a self-contained working society to a place reshaped for outsiders.

In the 1700s and 1800s, these figures were a practical reality for a community whose survival depended on the unpredictable nature of the sea. Local people didn't see them as magical icons but as earthy, weathered beings that explained why a boat might fail or why a path home became suddenly confusing in the dark.

This era of deep belief was tied to a world where life was risky, manual labour was the norm and local knowledge was passed down through generations without much influence from the outside world.

While they weren't seen as purely evil, piskies were feared because they represented the danger and randomness of a life lived on the edge of the sea. To a fisherman in the 1800s, a piskie wasn't a fairy tale; it was a way to personify the uncertain forces that could ruin a life's work in a single night.

They were seen as fickle and easily offended, and the fear was rooted in the immediate consequences of crossing them—whether that meant a

shredded net, a boat that wouldn't start or a sudden, thick fog that left a man helpless in the dark.

This fear was a materially grounded part of daily survival to keep people alert to the risks of their environment. People treated piskies with a cautious, uneasy respect, performing small rituals like turning their clothes inside out or leaving offerings as a form of protection against the unpredictable outcomes of the harbour. It was a functional kind of fear that kept the community tied to the rhythm of daily life and the harsh reality of the coast.

Gradually, the piskie was stripped of its teeth and turned into a harmless plastic trinket. The decline of this belief began in the late 19th century as artists and travellers started visiting, turning what was once a serious local truth into a curious bit of folklore for entertainment.

As formal schooling and industrial technology arrived in the early 20th century, the younger generations began to rely on science and modern navigation rather than old beliefd to explain the world around them. By the 1950s and 60s, the community itself began to change fundamentally as fishing families left and the economy turned towards visitors.

Without the daily pressure of working the harbour, the original purpose of the piskie vanished, leaving the figure to be stripped of its grit and rebuilt as a smiling plastic item sold to people who have no connection to the village's difficult past.

The local becomes a ghost

And so, the village is adjusted, piece by piece to match what people come to see and expect to find. Tourism grows from this adjustment. More visitors arrive over longer periods of the year. Services begin to shift towards them, and shops are aimed at passing trade and seasonal demand. Buildings are altered to suit shorter stays, with internal changes that support temporary occupation.

At this point, the economy turns outwards more clearly. Income becomes tied to external demand, which fluctuates according to season, fashion and access rather than local production.

This pattern can be found across many coastal regions. In Cornwall and Devon, in parts of Wales, along the Yorkshire coast, in Scottish fishing villages and in comparable settlements across Europe and beyond. The details differ from place to place, shaped by geography and history, but the direction of change remains similar. Places once organised around work move towards serving visitors, often while retaining the outward form of earlier use.

As this shift deepens, housing changes its role in ways that affect the structure of the village. Homes that once supported families tied to local work are bought and held differently over time. Some are used only part of the year. Others are converted into short-term rentals. Ownership patterns reveal more people with limited connection to the place and based on investment value.

This alters how the village functions at a basic level. Streets that were once lived in throughout the year become partially empty outside peak seasons. Services that depend on stable populations weaken or close. Shops adjust to irregular demand. The rhythm of daily life becomes uneven, with periods of intensity followed by periods of low activity.

This is a form of enclosure without physical barriers. Exclusion is shaped through affordability (expensive restaurants and hotels) and systems of allocation (fewer locals and more holiday lets). Remaining in the village becomes tied to income that is often earned elsewhere or through participation in the visitor economy itself.

Over time, the effects accumulate and become more difficult to reverse. Long-term residents leave, through pressure, cost or lack of opportunity, while younger generations find it difficult to remain or return. Schools lose pupils and close. Local trades decline as demand shifts and skills are no longer required in the same way. Knowledge tied to fishing, repair and local conditions is passed on less often and with less continuity.

The village no longer supports a stable working community in the way it once did. It becomes dependent on a flow of visitors and on decisions made elsewhere, often at a distance.

In recent decades, digital platforms have accelerated and standardised this process. Housing is divided into units that can be booked and priced individually. The systems that manage this operate at a distance from the village itself.

This creates further separation. Value is generated through the place, through its appearance and location, while much of that value is realised elsewhere.

At the same time, these systems shape how the village is presented. It must appear consistent and easy to understand quickly. Interiors are arranged to meet shared expectations, while exteriors are maintained to fit a recognisable pattern (of quaintness) that can be repeated across listings.

Differences that once came from local conditions are reduced in emphasis and produce a flattening that operates across many places at once. Villages that once differed in how they functioned begin to resemble each other in how they are presented and used. Surface variation remains, but the underlying structure aligns.

What we now see may be described as some kind of sprawling theme park stretching across the landscape from village to village. Like farming, the fishing industry saw a drive to get big or get out, and many villages are dominated by those who can afford second homes, ‘quaint’ cottages and barn conversions.

Polperro sits within this wider change. Its streets follow the same lines, and the visual form remains strong and continues to attract attention.

But the connection between these forms and the activities that shaped them has weakened over time. Boats are fewer. Processing has moved elsewhere. The link between sea, labour and daily life no longer holds in the same way it once did.

It is now possible to be in the village without taking part in the systems that once sustained it. Visitors can arrive, stay and leave with little contact with those conditions or with those who remain tied to them.

The harbour recedes into the background over time, and the quay becomes quiet for longer periods. The village becomes a managed and curated

environment. This process forms part of a wider restructuring in which places are drawn into larger systems that prioritise visibility, access and financial return over continuity rooted in place.

This same movement appears inland, though it is less tied to the presence of visitors and more to the withdrawal of local function into wider systems that no longer depend on the village as a working unit.

Villages once structured by farming, small industry and local exchange were never isolated, but they were organised through what happened within them. Work, housing, services and movement were aligned through proximity. The village held together because its parts depended on each other in place.

Different villages, shaped by different kinds of work, begin to converge in how they are maintained, presented and used. Agricultural, industrial, coastal or mixed histories become secondary to a shared requirement of what it means to be a ‘village’ in an increasingly globalised world where the ‘local’ has been displaced.

Aside from holiday lets, in the modern hollowed-out village, we see a proliferation of the new ‘growth’ industry of visitor centres, guided tours and gift shops to attract tourists and schools who can marvel at some carefully curated and commodified version of the location’s former mining, wool, pottery or fishing (take your pick) industry.

What is being enclosed is not land in the older sense but the range of possible uses that a place is allowed to sustain. Access remains open (to those who can afford to stay) but use becomes channelled, mediated by the needs of a globalised economy and private capital located elsewhere.

Housing, in particular, becomes a mechanism through which this enclosure operates. When dwellings shift into intermittent occupation, external ownership or short-term use, the village is no longer structured around the people who maintain its daily continuity.

The village persists as form, but its internal logic is maintained through external valuation, external demand and external patterns of use.

Enclosure has become informational, economic and infrastructural rather than spatial. It operates through replacement of function rather than restriction of movement. And flattening (homegenisation) operates through repetition of what remains visible after that replacement.

Responses to the trends described have included planning controls such as principal residence requirements, tighter regulation of short-term lets and increased taxation on second homes. These policies represent efforts to reassert permanence in places where occupancy has become intermittent and externally determined.

In areas like St Ives in Cornwall, and more broadly across the county through the work of Cornwall Council, these measures mark a clear recognition that housing is a vital aspect through which local continuity is either maintained or dissolved.

Yet these interventions operate within limits set by the wider systems they are responding to. They can regulate rates of change, but they do not fundamentally alter the direction of travel described here: the separation of place from use and of settlement from the everyday systems that once gave a place internal coherence.

What they can do, at best, is preserve fragments of that earlier condition by keeping a proportion of housing tied to permanent residency, sustaining minimum thresholds of local population and preventing complete seasonal conversion.

Seen in this light, we are not seeing a return to a previous equilibrium but a negotiation with its absence. Although the village persists, its internal logic is now largely produced elsewhere. Policy becomes a kind of pushback against that displacement and a management of the unravelling closed systems of work, housing and knowledge described above.

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Chapter Three

Cheddarisation

The decline of regional British cheeses is emblematic of the broader process of homogenisation, or the ‘great flattening’, through which land, culture and the human body lose autonomy and diversity.

There is a huge library of literature on British cheese, but the vast majority of books focus on flavour profiles, history and the artisan cheesemaker. Many also appear to be gastronomical guides for consumers.

However, in this chapter, the decline of regional cheese varieties is framed as a loss of agency and the destruction of a ‘biological lane’ that allowed humans to exist outside of a corporate-managed supply chain. The chapter uses cheese as a metaphor and as a material example of how biological and social processes get erased or reorganised under the logic of ‘progress’ and modernity.

Let us begin by understanding that the homogenisation of the city street, with its sterile glass facades and retail chains, has a biological twin in the dairy vat. Whereas the modern city involves the enclosure of the vibrant lane, ‘Cheddarisation’ arguably entails the enclosure of the microbial commons.

For centuries, the British landscape was defined by a staggering map of lactic diversity. It was a decentralised network of territorial cheeses that were the direct expression of specific valleys, local cattle breeds and unique communities of ‘wild’ bacteria.

This diversity, however, was a problem. Just as industrial agriculture sought to replace the complex, unpredictable field with a chemical-intensive crop monoculture, the priorities of the state and the incentives of industry aligned so that the British dairy map became flattened into a single, manageable profile. This process was epitomised by the wartime mandate of the Second

World War for ‘national Cheddar’, which effectively changed the British national diet.

This system did solve a genuine problem at the time, however. The state needed to ensure that the population was fed during war. But in addressing this issue, it also opted for a solution in which only the standardised could survive.

The British cheese map was once as diverse as the regional accents that persist throughout Britain today, but during the Second World War, the UK Ministry of Food effectively banned the production of many regional cheeses. It mandated the production of a single, standardised national Cheddar because it was durable, transportable and convenient for a centralised rationing system.

What began as a wartime necessity became a preference by the state and industry for a single, manageable ‘monoculture’ over a thousand unpredictable regional variations. It entailed hundreds of farmhouse recipes that had been passed down for centuries being virtually wiped out in less than a decade.

The policy was devised as a temporary solution to scarcity but hardened into a permanent preference for systems that are legible (easy to understand and recognise), centralised and governable. We continue to see it today in the food supply, in agriculture and in the management of microbial life and human diets.

Traditional cheeses relied on the specific bacteria found in the local air, the wooden aging shelves and the raw milk of local cattle breeds (like the Shorthorn or the Gloucester). Industrial cheese relies on ‘direct vat inoculation’, which involves standardised, lab-grown, patented freeze-dried bacteria produced by global biotech firms.

This means the farmer no longer works with the life already present on the farm. The farmer must buy a corporate biological starter.

Just as every high street is forced to look the same to satisfy corporate logistics, the British dairy map was eventually flattened to satisfy the supermarket shelf. For instance, the original Wensleydale was a blue-

veined, moist cheese that was flattened into a dry, white, acidic block because that version was easier to mass-produce and package.

Regional cheese is the ultimate unpredictable biological product. It changes with the seasons, the grass and the weather. By destroying these varieties, the system didn't just change diet but removed a connection to s specific tract of land and the soil and minerals associated with it and a particular breed of cattle.

Before the mid-20th century, a Cheddar cheese was a reflection of the Mendip Hills. Since then, dozens of territorial cheeses have either vanished or been reduced to a single industrial profile.

Traditional Lancashire cheese was made by mixing curd from three different days of milking. This created a complex, live bacterial profile. However, mass produced industrialisation demanded a single-day curd, resulting in the crumbly Lancashire we see today—a shadow of the original varieties that were once staples of the mining communities in the county.

At the same time, Wales was a powerhouse of small-scale lactic diversity. While we still see it today, the original farmhouse Caerphilly was a miners' cheese that was moist and salty to replenish lost minerals. It was historically made all over the south and west of Wales, but during the Second World War, the Ministry of Food effectively stopped its production to focus on national Cheddar.

Meanwhile, Galloway and Suffolk Bang were regional hard cheeses. The Suffolk Bang was so hard it was joked that it needed to be cut with an axe. While it sounds unappealing to the modern palate, it was a high-protein, long-lasting storage food for the rural poor that required no refrigeration and no global supply chain.

Historically, there were dozens of unnamed blue cheeses made across Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. Colwick cheese was a fresh, uncooked curd cheese from Nottingham that dates back to the 1600s. It was soft, shaped like a bowl and meant to be eaten within days. It vanished because it couldn't survive the need for centralised distribution. It was too local, too ‘alive’ and too unpredictable for the supermarket shelf.

The great flattening

The discussion about cheese is essentially about lost biological resilience and a flattening of the great British countryside. The decline of these cheeses mirrors the decline of regional cattle breeds. To make industrial cheddar, you need the Holstein, a high-output 'biological machine'. To make the old Wensleydale or Lancashire, you needed the Shorthorn or the Gloucester breeds that lived in reciprocity with specific regional grasses.

Post-1945, we didn't just lose recipes and methods of production in the countryside but allowed a certain logic to erase a specific set of biological phenomena that had co-evolved with the British landscape for centuries.

The government's Cheddar mandate was the ultimate historical example of the 'great flattening'. It was the moment the state and industry conspired to replace a thousand regional whispers with a single, manageable, corporate shout.

The mandate was a logistical shift. But it was also a psychological and ecological eviction. Before 1940, the British countryside resembled a patchwork of micro-sovereignties. Every farmhouse dairy was a laboratory of the local, where the specific minerals of the soil, the unique flora of the pasture and the inherited wisdom of the family converged into a single wheel of cheese. This was the 'lactic lane', a pathway of knowledge that required a slow human touch to maintain.

The farmhouse dairy, once the beating heart of rural self-sufficiency, was silenced. The shorthorn and the Gloucester had co-evolved with their specific landscapes. These breeds were sidelined in favour of the high-output, standardised cattle that the industrial system demanded.

This was the moment the 'agrarian imagination' began to wither. By removing the need for the farmer to listen to the specific rhythms of their land and its microbes, the state transformed the farmer from a steward of a biological commons into a cog in a managed supply chain.

The essence of the countryside with its unpredictability and seasonal pulse was smoothed over. In its place, we were left with an industrial landscape

that no longer whispered of its history. In its place we witnessed a mechanical efficiency.

But the loss of regional cheese is not merely a tragedy of the palate. It is also a rupture in the biological continuum that once bound the biology of the human body to the specificities of the earth.

For millennia, the human microbiome was in some ways like a mirror image of the local landscape. Located in the gut, this microbiome comprises up to six pounds of bacteria, viruses and microbes. It can be regarded as human soil.

While the nerve endings for the major organs are located within the organs themselves, they are governed by a 'highway' called the vagus nerve that starts in the gut. Here, the microbiome acts like a chemical factory, producing the neurotransmitters and nutrients that nourish and protect the entire nervous system. By 'tasting' these microbial signals, the gut serves as a central hub that fuels the health and communication of the nerves throughout the body.

Historically, our guts were populated by the same wild bacteria found in the soils we tilled, the raw milk we drank and the fermented foods—like the complex, multi-day curd of traditional Lancashire—that we consumed.

By mandating a single national Cheddar, the state performed a mass-inoculation of the British public with a simplified biological profile. Just as a healthy meadow requires a diverse ecosystem of microbes to flourish, the human 'internal commons' (the gut microbiome), once reflected a staggering biological diversity.

In essence, we were as varied in our internal biology as the cheese varieties discussed. To eat a cheese from the Mendip Hills or a blue-veined Wensleydale was to inoculate oneself with the unique signature of that specific valley.

However, industrialisation demanded that both the cheese and the person eating it be predictable, standardised and manageable. And by drenching the land in synthetic chemicals like glyphosate, the industrial system has

effectively contributed to the disruption of the ‘biological lane’ between soil and gut.

As we replaced hundreds of regional cheeses with a single national Cheddar profile, we began the process of flattening our own internal ecosystems. We have moved from being diverse biological lanes to becoming recipients of a corporate-managed diet.

The enclosure of the human microbiome can be seen as an extension of the enclosure of the land. If the smart city is the digital overseer of the street, then the standardised, ultra-processed diet is the biological overseer of the body. Once our internal ecology is destroyed by corporate chemicals and uniform diets, we lose the resilience that supported a higher degree of biological resilience and autonomy.

First, the land was taken, then the seeds and finally the very microbes that allowed us to turn grass into independence.

So, today, every act of choosing a live local cheese or supporting the micro-sovereignty of a farmhouse dairy or, for that matter, food grown organically on local farms, can be read as a small act of biological resistance. It is a refusal to allow our internal human soil to be turned into a sterile desert.

To reclaim the regional is to reclaim the right to have a body that still whispers of the earth. But are these little more than idealistic sentiments that hark back to a world long gone?

Unflattening the cheese

While regenerative agriculture, agroecology and the use of indigenous seeds prove that industrial homogenisation is not inevitable, the dairy world offers its own powerful resistance. In British cheesemaking, the alternative to a life flattened by standardisation is already being practiced in pockets across the country, showing that local food systems can thrive even in the face of global trends.

By adhering to regenerative agroecology, Westcombe Dairy in Somerset not only makes cheese but rebuilds the soil from the bottom up. In the industrial model, soil is treated as an inert substrate to be drenched in chemicals. By ditching artificial fertilisers and planting diverse herbal leys comprising

complex mixes of deep-rooted grasses, chicory and clover, it has turned the farm into a self-sustaining loop.

This is a move away from being a captive customer of big agriscience and back to being a partner with the land. The result is a healthier farm and a thicker milk that carries the specific mineral signature of the Mendip Hills.

Stichelton Dairy in Nottinghamshire offers a lesson in the courage required to protect a biological legacy. For decades, the name ‘Stilton’ has been a global shorthand for English blue cheese, but the legal definition now mandates pasteurisation, which strips the milk of its unique microbial character.

The makers of Stichelton chose to give up that famous, lucrative name because they refused to heat the life out of their milk. They decided that the biological truth of the recipe (the complex, raw-milk flora that gives the cheese its soul) was more important than a government-sanctioned brand name. In doing so, they created a cheese that exists outside the bureaucratic enclosure.

In the Teifi Valley of Wales, Caws Teifi operates like a living archive. While the industrial system tends to flatten flavour, this dairy works with the ‘wild’ bacteria of the local landscape. By using raw milk, it ensures that the unique microbial memory of the local valley isn't erased. The dairy is keeping a specific identity alive in a world that would prefer every block of cheese to taste exactly like the last.

Finally, the Cheddar Gorge Cheese Company maintains a connection to geology that a factory cannot replicate. While the rest of the world makes ‘Cheddar’ in stainless-steel sheds with computer-controlled humidity, this company still carries its wheels into the local caves.

It allows the limestone cliffs themselves to act as the aging agent. The damp, constant breath of the cave—the actual atmosphere of the Mendips—does the work that a factory would do with chemicals and climate control.

These dairies suggest that the most sophisticated technology for making food is to be found in the diversity of the land itself.

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Chapter Four

Silent Fields

An anthropogenic mass extinction is underway. It will affect all life on the planet and humans may struggle to adapt. Dr Rosemary Mason stated this in a 2015 paper in the Journal of Biological Physics and Chemistry.

Loss of biodiversity is the most urgent of the environmental problems because this type of diversity is critical to ecosystems and human health. Mason argued that the modern chemical-intensive industrialised system of food and agriculture is a major contributing factor.

Research (published in 2017) conducted in Germany supported the contention that we are heading for an "ecological Armageddon", similar to the situation described by Mason. The study showed the abundance of flying insects had plunged by three-quarters over the past 25 years. The research data was gathered in nature reserves across Germany.

At the time (cited in The Guardian), Prof Dave Goulson of Sussex University and part of the team behind the study, said, "We appear to be making vast tracts of land inhospitable to most forms of life... If we lose the insects, then everything is going to collapse."

Flying insects are vital because they pollinate flowers. Moreover, many, not least bees, are important for pollinating key food crops. Most fruit crops are insect-pollinated, and insects also provide food for many animals, including birds, bats, some mammals, fish, reptiles and amphibians.

Flies, beetles and wasps are also predators and important decomposers, breaking down dead plants and animals. And insects form the base of thousands of food chains; their disappearance is a principal reason Britain's farmland birds have more than halved in number since 1970.

Indeed, the 2016 State of Nature Report found that one in 10 UK wildlife species are threatened with extinction, with numbers of certain creatures having plummeted by two thirds since 1970.

For more than a decade, Rosemary Mason provided detailed accounts of massive insect declines on her own nature reserve in South Wales. She published first-hand accounts of the destruction of biodiversity on the reserve in various books and documents that have been submitted to relevant officials and pesticide regulation authorities in the UK and beyond.

From around 2010 to 2022, Mason also wrote numerous open letters to officials citing reams of statistical data to support the contention that agrochemicals, especially Bayer-Monsanto's glyphosate-based Roundup, have devastated the natural environment and have also led to spiralling rates of illness and disease, especially among children.

She indicated how the widespread use on agricultural crops of neonicotinoid insecticides and the herbicide glyphosate, both of which cause immune suppression, make species vulnerable to emerging infectious pathogens, driving large-scale wildlife extinctions, including essential pollinators.

Providing evidence to show how human disease patterns correlate remarkably well with the rate of glyphosate usage on corn, soy and wheat crops, which has increased due to 'Roundup Ready' genetically engineered crops, Mason argued that our over-reliance on chemicals in agriculture causes irreparable harm to all beings on this planet.

The global pesticides industry has created chemicals of mass destruction and succeeded in getting many of their poisons on the commercial market by highly questionable means.

In 2015, Carol Van Strum said, "The EPA [*US Environment Protection Agency*] has been routinely lying about the safety of pesticides since it took over pesticide registrations in 1970."

Van Strum highlighted the faked data and fraudulent tests that led to many highly toxic agrochemicals reaching the market; they still remain in use, regardless of the devastating impacts on wildlife and human health.

The blatant disregard over the use of these substances by regulatory agencies around the world is apparent. At each stage of her letter-writing campaign to make the authorities call agrochemical manufacturers to account, Mason was frustrated by the lack of concern demonstrated by officialdom. This indifference to the poisoning of both humans and the environment may reflect high-level collusion (which she went on to track) and institutionalised corruption between government and the agrochemical corporations.

The research on insect population decline in Germany followed a warning by a chief scientific adviser to the UK government who claimed that regulators around the world have falsely assumed that it is safe to use pesticides at industrial scales across landscapes. It also stated that the "effects of dosing whole landscapes with chemicals have been largely ignored."

And prior to that particular warning, there was a report delivered to the UN Human Rights Council saying that pesticides have catastrophic impacts on the environment, human health and society as a whole.

Authored by Hilal Elver, who was then UN special rapporteur on the right to food, and Baskut Tuncak, UN special rapporteur on toxics at the time, the report stated, "Chronic exposure to pesticides has been linked to cancer, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, hormone disruption, developmental disorders and sterility."

Although the pesticide industry argues that its products are vital for protecting crops and ensuring sufficient food supplies, Elver said that such statements are a myth.

The report argued the following:

"While scientific research confirms the adverse effects of pesticides, proving a definitive link between exposure and human diseases or conditions or harm to the ecosystem presents a considerable challenge. This challenge has been exacerbated by a systematic denial, fuelled by the pesticide and agro-industry, of the magnitude of the damage inflicted by these chemicals and aggressive, unethical marketing tactics."

Elver claimed, “The power of the corporations over governments and over the scientific community is extremely important. If you want to deal with pesticides, you have to deal with the companies.”

The report recommended a move towards a global treaty to govern the use of pesticides and (like many other official reports have argued) a shift to sustainable practice based on natural methods of suppressing pests and crop rotation and organically produced food.

Long ago, Rachel Carson in her groundbreaking book Silent Spring (1962) raised the red flag about the use of harmful synthetic pesticides. Yet despite the warnings, the agrochemical giants have ever since hid behind bought science to cover up the harm they knowingly do.

When you drench soil with proprietary synthetic chemicals, introduce company-patented genetically tampered crops or continuously monocrop as part of a corporate-controlled industrial farming system, you kill essential microbes, upset soil balance and end up feeding soil a limited ‘doughnut diet’ of unhealthy inputs.

These companies, their lobbyists and bought journalists and scientists attempt to get the public and various agencies to bow before the altar of corporate ‘science’ and its scientific priesthood.

In 2017, Michael McCarthy, writer and naturalist, said that three generations of industrialised farming with a vast tide of poisons pouring over the land year after year after year, since the end of the Second World War, is the true price of pesticide-based agriculture, which society has for so long blithely accepted. Modern farming is in effect a principal source of global toxification and soil degradation.

However, companies use tobacco tactics and science to try to confuse the issues and will even get their media and academic mouthpieces to ghost write ‘independent’ pieces to defend their products.

Chemical-intensive Green Revolution technology and ideology have effectively uprooted indigenous agriculture across the planet and have recast farming according to the needs of global agribusiness and its supply

chains. This has had devastating effects on regions, rural communities, diets, soils, health and water pollution.

Nevertheless, this financially lucrative venture for transnational corporations continues apace, spearheaded by the Gates Foundation in Africa and the World Bank's 'enabling the business of agriculture'.

This model of agriculture is poisoning life and the environment and undermining genuine food security throughout the globe. Power is now increasingly concentrated in the hands of a handful of transnational agribusiness corporations that put profit and market control ahead of food security, health and nutrition and biodiversity.

These companies seek to convince us that their model of agriculture, based on proprietary seeds and chemicals, is essential for feeding a burgeoning global population.

They mouth platitudes about choice and democracy, while curtailing both as they infiltrate and subvert regulatory agencies and government machinery. And they seek to continually degrade and marginalise approaches to agriculture that are sustainable and which produce healthy food.

Instead of accepting their model is both a failure and destructive, what we see under the banner of 'innovation' is even stronger pesticides and the roll-out of next-generation untested genetically engineered food and synthetic alternatives to food coming down the pipeline (with all that entails for health and the further undermining of food security).

While governments, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, trade agreements and regulatory agencies remain tethered to the interests of the powerful corporations that have come to define the nature of global food and agriculture, there are alternatives to this system.

Silence of the concrete

What is happening in the countryside increasingly almost mirrors what we see in cities. In essence, we are to some extent witnessing a profound convergence of potential ecological and social collapse. Both are underpinned by a similar logic.

For decades, the industrial food system has waged a quiet war of attrition against the natural world, transforming vibrant ecosystems into biological deserts. As Rosemary Mason and others have documented, the widespread application of systemic pesticides has triggered a slow-motion ecological catastrophe.

Yet this is not merely an agricultural crisis. The transformation of agriculture under globalisation (and before that colonialism) involved the systematic dismantling of local systems and their integration into global markets. Similar dynamics are now visible beyond agriculture, shaping urban environments, digital infrastructures and everyday life.

Across much of the so-called 'developed' world, urban life is being reorganised according to principles that mirror industrial agriculture: efficiency, control, predictability and the elimination of unregulated complexity.

Just as agro-industrial systems treat biodiversity as a problem to be managed, contemporary urban planning increasingly treats spontaneous human activity, which manifests in the unpredictable, informal life of streets and neighbourhoods, as a form of disorder requiring containment.

The result is the emergence of what might be called an architecture of erasure: a systematic removal of the ecological and social diversity that once sustained both landscapes and communities.

Industrial agriculture is often guided by the premise that nature can be managed more effectively when simplified: it functions best when reduced to a tightly controlled system of inputs and outputs. Biodiversity, in this framework, becomes inefficiency. Insects are viewed as threatening yields, while soil organisms introduce variability into carefully managed processes. The solution, from the perspective of industrial agronomy, has been to simplify.

Monoculture replaces ecological complexity with uniformity. Chemical inputs replace biological relationships. Herbicides eliminate competing plants. Pesticides suppress insects and other organisms deemed harmful to production. Seeds and soil microbes become engineered commodities, designed to function within this chemically mediated environment.

For a time, industrial agriculture was celebrated as a triumph of human ingenuity over natural limitations. However, evidence of this model's harmful impacts is increasingly difficult to ignore.

Industrial agriculture has created a controlled ecosystem that functions only so long as its technological scaffolding remains intact.

A strikingly similar logic is now reshaping urban space. Cities have historically thrived on complexity. Their vitality emerges from dense networks of human interaction: street vendors, informal markets, children playing in public spaces, neighbours gathering in cafés or parks. This spontaneous social activity produces an unpredictable yet resilient web of relationships that gives urban life its character and adaptability.

Increasingly, however, contemporary urban planning treats this spontaneity as a problem. Informal economies are replaced by regulated retail chains. Public squares give way to privately managed commercial developments. Surveillance technologies monitor movement through spaces designed for maximum visibility and control.

What emerges is the urban equivalent of monoculture.

Shopping complexes, business districts and transport hubs replace the

Spirit of George Town, Chennai

Pungent odours burn the back of the throat. They come from street-side stoves that cook dosas, idli, sambar for the labouring masses. They seep from sacks of spices thrown down hard outside wholesale traders from carts and trucks. Cycle rickshaws, overloaded cycle carts packed high with boxes or six-metre-long tubes and men with huge, heavy sacks rush by. All have right of way. Boxes of metal pressure valves, fluorescent light tubes, surgical appliances, herbal medicines and TVs. Sacks of flour, rice, spices and produce. Tubing made of plastic or metal. Tubing for underground cables, electrical machinery and all manner of components and parts for ships, factories and houses. Shree Grinders, Lakshmi Buildings, Ganesh Traders. The names of gods adorn the signage in this area. This area of a thousand one-room workshops and trading offices and wholesale merchants, all milling, grinding, beating, buying, selling, importing and exporting. Textiles wrapped around rolls. Sheets of plastic rolled around tubes. Whole families clung around seats of mopeds. Four or five to a seat. Sacks of garlic or apples lifted on the back from trucks or cycle carts into premises. Sacks of spices on the hardened dark-skinned backs of tough-looking men. Neighbourhood centres, marriage halls and Jain and Hindu temples. Apartment blocks, back-lane schools and small hospitals. An area of commerce and hard labour. An area of community… many communities

heterogeneous fabric of older neighbourhoods. Their environments are carefully curated to ensure predictability with controlled pedestrian flows and algorithmically optimised logistics. Activities that fall outside this controlled framework are often discouraged or actively excluded.

Old photographs of Britain (if you are of a certain age—old memories) are reminders of a period of cohesive communities and industrial landscapes that were rapidly swept away within a generation. This was done in the name of 'progress'. The consequences have been critically examined by writer Paul Kingsnorth in his book *Real England: The Battle Against the Bland*.

Kingsnorth laments the loss of authentic pubs, rural hedgerows, affordable housing, individuality and character in towns due to corporate greed and an insatiable quest for profit—a phenomenon described by one insightful reviewer as a *Starbucked, Wetherspooned* avalanche.

This transformation is frequently justified in the language of efficiency. Yet its deeper consequence is the gradual sterilisation of public life. Just as industrial agriculture removes ecological diversity, technocratic urbanism removes social diversity, replacing it with homogenised environments that are easier to monitor and monetise.

The result is the modern phenomenon of the silent street: spaces that are devoid of the spontaneous vitality that once defined urban life. But at the heart of both transformations lies a more subtle process: the erosion of human agency.

Traditional agriculture relied heavily on tacit knowledge—the accumulated experience of farmers who understood the rhythms of soil, weather and local ecosystems. Industrial farming systems, by contrast, replace this knowledge with standardised technological packages like patented seeds, chemical inputs and algorithmically guided machinery. Farmers become operators within a larger system whose underlying logic is controlled elsewhere.

In cities, digital infrastructures increasingly mediate everyday life: navigation apps determine how we move through urban space, algorithmic management shapes work in the gig economy and surveillance technologies regulate behaviour in public environments. Decisions once negotiated

within communities are delegated to centralised systems designed to optimise efficiency.

In both contexts, people are no longer participants in complex living systems but users of technological platforms. Their role is to operate within parameters defined by distant institutions ranging from agribusiness corporations to institutional investors, urban development firms and state planners.

Ecologists often describe healthy ecosystems as open systems—networks of relationships through which energy, nutrients and information circulate dynamically. Diversity within these systems provides resilience. When one component fails, others adapt and compensate.

Industrial agriculture moves in the opposite direction. By eliminating diversity and replacing ecological relationships with technological substitutes, it creates a closed system dependent on continuous external inputs. Remove those inputs, and the system rapidly collapses.

Urban environments that suppress informal activity and spontaneous social interaction may appear orderly and efficient. Yet they risk losing the very qualities that allow cities to adapt and evolve. Community groups, neighbourhood economies and cultural traditions have historically played a crucial role in urban resilience. They provide support during economic shocks while fostering innovation and maintaining social cohesion.

When these networks are weakened or replaced by centralised systems, their apparent stability depends increasingly on technological infrastructure and administrative oversight rather than on the self-organising capacities of communities themselves.

In this sense, the industrial field and the managed city share a common trajectory: both move towards a form of soulless systemic enclosure that reduces complexity in the pursuit of control.

The parallels between ecological and urban transformation are not merely metaphorical. They reveal a broader orientation towards monetisation, control and technological mediation—a worldview or power play that treats complexity as a problem to be solved.

Yet the ecological crisis now unfolding demonstrates the limits of this approach. Systems stripped of diversity lose their resilience. Landscapes engineered for maximum efficiency and control become vulnerable to collapse. The same may prove true for human environments.

Reversing this trajectory will require more than technical adjustments. It will demand a renewed recognition of the value of complexity itself. Ecological restoration efforts increasingly emphasise the importance of reintroducing biodiversity, allowing landscapes to recover their capacity for self-regulation.

Similarly, urban thinkers have begun advocating to protect public space, encourage local initiative and preserve the unpredictable social vitality that defines living cities.

Silent fields and silent streets are warnings. They remind us that prevailing systems of power designed to commodify every aspect of life erode autonomy and complexity and may ultimately erase the very conditions that allow human life and culture to flourish.

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Chapter Five

Oracle

While the digital 'Oracle' systems discussed below seem futuristic, they operate on the same logic of standardisation we observed in previous chapters that looked at the industrialisation of the microbiome and agriculture. Here, we will examine the way large-scale digital infrastructure systems are reshaping how information, resources and decision-making are organised across society, from government and industry to agriculture and media.

A key player here is Larry Ellison, born in 1944 in New York City. He briefly attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign but dropped out after his adoptive mother died. He then later enrolled at the University of Chicago, where he first encountered computer programming. He left again without finishing a degree, which makes him one of the most prominent self-taught figures in the tech world.

In the 1960s, he moved to California, drawn by the growing tech scene. He took on a series of programming jobs, including work at Ampex, where he was involved in a project influenced by the ideas of Edgar F Codd. Codd's theories on relational databases became a foundation for Ellison's future work.

In 1977, Ellison co-founded Oracle Corporation, which would go on to become a dominant force in database software and enterprise technology. He led the company for decades, which became one of the largest and most influential software firms in the world.

Larry Ellison, today, is one of the richest people on the planet. His wealth is the foundation of a sprawling empire that fuses technology, media and politics.

Oracle, born from a CIA-linked database project, has grown into the backbone of government and corporate data infrastructure, powering systems that manage everything from tax records and defence logistics to cloud-based enterprise platforms. This origin is but one case of how enterprise database systems are shaped by state and corporate demand.

Ellison now positions the company as the central nervous system of artificial intelligence. The company's ambition is both to store information and to control the algorithms that process it. In other words, to sit at the helm of the black box of AI, deciding what is measured, what is permitted to exist and what is erased.

The Ellison family's reach extends into Hollywood, where David Ellison's (Larry's son) Skydance Media controls Paramount and CBS, and Megan Ellison's (daughter) Annapurna Pictures has produced films that shape cultural narratives. Together, they exert influence over Warner Bros and Paramount, ensuring that the same control logic that governs the AI black box also governs the wider population's imagination.

These outcomes also reflect broader shifts in data infrastructure across multiple competing firms and institutions.

Ellison's political influence is equally significant. He provides vital for the Tony Blair Institute, which has become a leading advocate for digital identity systems. Blair has argued that digital ID is the fundamental building block of modern governance, but it could better be described as the foundation of an open prison.

Digital ID—already being proposed and trialled in various national governance systems—is the gateway to total AI-mediated control: every transaction and movement monitored and scored. Ellison's support for Blair's agenda reveals the deeper ambition to integrate citizen data, government records and even farmers' soil and seed data into a single AI-driven system.

This ambition is tied to a pro-Israel agenda. Ellison has invested heavily in Israeli military technology and surveillance ventures, aligning Oracle's infrastructure with geopolitical power.

The black box of AI is not neutral; it is aligned with state-corporate interests that demand uninterrupted throughput and control. Just as Oracle harvests citizen data in cities, agritech ventures aim to harvest soil, seed and farmer data. AI-driven farmerless farms are the rural counterpart to the smart city, erasing sovereignty in favour of algorithmic dependency.

The danger is not simply that AI will monitor everything we do but that the logic of AI itself—opaque, centralised and controlled by a handful of billionaires and pressed into the service of capital—becomes the new cosmology. It replaces unpredictability with control as algorithmic systems used in areas such as predictive policing, credit scoring and platform-based labour management increasingly shape decisions once made through human judgment.

The dystopian AI-controlled future is the culmination of the system described throughout this book: the sterilisation of street culture, the zoning of hawkers, the silence of the fields, the *Starbucksed* city. All converge in the black box of AI, where humanity could be reduced to data points in a managed economy.

However, this represents a dominant trajectory rather than a final or exclusive outcome.

In his episode '[Meet The Ellisons: Zionists, Technocrats, Moguls]' (10 March 2026), James Corbett traces the arc of Larry Ellison and his family empire. Their story is one of wealth accumulation and of the architecture of control itself.

Oracle is key to a computational universe that tends to replace autonomy, unpredictability and the sacred with a managed reality. Where Amsterdam's raw street culture was sterilised into a transit hub, AI represents the same logic at planetary scale: spontaneity engineered away, replaced by systems that demand predictability and throughput.

The company's origins are telling. In the mid-1970s, Ellison and his partners were contracted to build a database system for the CIA, codenamed 'Oracle'. The project's purpose was surveillance based on storing, retrieval and cross-referencing vast amounts of intelligence data. The company took

its name directly from this project, signalling from the outset its role as a tool of oversight and control.

Oracle pioneered the conversion of life into data, helping to build the infrastructure that renders human action, land and labour into quantifiable units for extraction. In this sense, AI is the prototype of enclosure, the corporate equivalent of the *Starbucksed* city: a sensory desert that can dull the mind and homogenise thought.

Over the decades, Oracle became indispensable to governments and corporations alike. Its databases power the Pentagon's logistics, the IRS's tax records and countless national security systems. Ellison cultivated contracts with the Department of Defense, positioning Oracle as the backbone of American surveillance infrastructure. Healthcare records, biometric data and predictive policing algorithms flow through Oracle's servers.

Ellison's empire in cloud computing and national security databases mirrors the smart city logic described earlier: unpredictability is treated as a design flaw.

The same logic that governs the eviction of hawkers in Chennai or the criminalisation of squatting in Amsterdam is scaled globally through Oracle's platforms.

Corbett's analysis underscores how Ellison's technocratic vision dovetails with state-corporate imperatives for total oversight, creating a seamless web of control that stretches from the lane to the server farm. At this point, however, this process is uneven and varies across sectors, jurisdictions and institutional contexts.

What was once the messy resilience of the street is increasingly the sterile predictability of the database. The silence of the fields under chemical-intensive agriculture finds its urban counterpart in the silence of the server rack.

The Ellison family's reach extends beyond databases into culture itself. Megan Ellison founded Annapurna Pictures, producing films like *Her* and

Zero Dark Thirty, while David Ellison's Skydance Media bankrolls blockbusters from *Mission: Impossible* to *Top Gun: Maverick*.

These ventures are not neutral: modern vibrancy is packaged with spontaneity replaced by curated spectacle. The Ellisons' role in shaping film and media is a form of cultural engineering, a homogenisation of thought and being.

Corbett makes clear that the Ellisons are not just moguls of data but moguls of narrative, ensuring that the same logic of enclosure that governs the city and the farm also governs the imagination. The *Starbucksed* city is mirrored by the *Starbucksed* cinema, where even rebellion is packaged for consumption.

To de-colonise the imagination requires recognising how even our stories are enclosed by technocratic logic. Where once 'the lane' hosted a spontaneous band or a shrine beneath a banyan tree, now the imagination itself is zoned and branded.

Ellison's investments in high-tech agriculture and hydroponics connect directly to the AgriStack ID system, which is essentially a digital panopticon for farmers (AgriStack is a centralised digital infrastructure being developed by the Indian government to provide a unified platform for agricultural data, giving farmers unique digital IDs). He has poured money into ventures promising farmerless farms, where AI monitors hydroponic crops in sterile warehouses. Here, the sovereign farmer is displaced by algorithms.

The rhythms of reciprocity and seed sovereignty are bulldozed by Oracle-style data infrastructures. The same corporate logic that monitors citizens in smart cities now monitors soil, seed and farmer, enforcing dependency through predictive analytics. This points towards a new frontier of enclosure: the conversion of land and life into data streams.

Just as Chapter Four documented the silence of the fields under chemical-intensive agriculture, Ellison's systems extend that silence into the digital realm, replacing biodiversity with algorithmic monoculture. The farmer, like the citizen, becomes a dependent of a system seemingly too integrated to defy.

To defend the lane is to defend the seed, and to resist Oracle-type monopolisation is to resist the very infrastructure of enclosure.

Oracle is a living case study of how a computational universe of control operates across domains, from urban planning to agritech, culture and geopolitics.

In Oracle's systems, spontaneity, imagination and sovereignty are rendered obsolete. Oracle represents the digital brain of enclosure. Its database systems underpin government records, defence logistics and corporate data infrastructures, allowing vast streams of human activity to be captured, stored and analysed in real time

The enclosure of spontaneity, imagination and sovereignty should not be seen as inevitable. It is engineered and it can be undone.

The digital brain is a lived reality, a system of enclosure that stretches from the server to the cinema, from the farm to the frontline. To remain aware and to resist it is to reclaim autonomy.

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Chapter Six

Crude Harvest

The US-Israeli assault on Iran that began in March 2026 was sold by the US as a defensive manoeuvre. However, it functions as something far more revealing: a maintenance operation for a system of trade and energy enclosure that must increasingly rely on violence.

The Strait of Hormuz can be regarded as a pressure valve for the world economy. Any threat to close it disrupts the predictability that global markets depend on for pricing, investment and trade flows.

Since 1973, the petrodollar has served as the backbone of US power—an unwritten pact ensuring that global energy is traded in a single currency. This arrangement compelled every nation to hold dollar reserves, effectively tying the fate of a farmer in the Global South to the stability of a ledger in Washington.

That's because the petrodollar is not merely a financial abstraction. It is embedded in the global food system itself. The Green Revolution increasingly replaced soil biology with fossil fuel–derived inputs, turning agriculture into an extension of the energy economy and the petro-dollar system. And because industrial agriculture is structurally fused to fossil fuels, any shock to the energy system becomes a shock to the food system, resulting in spiralling food prices.

When the US bombs what is effectively part of the world's 'filling station', it raises the price of fuel. Because modern agriculture runs on that fuel—through diesel-powered machinery, natural gas–based fertilisers and global transport chains—this shock feeds directly into the cost of food production. In this way, control over energy markets becomes indirect control over who can afford to eat and therefore over populations themselves.

Any nation that attempts to transact outside the dollar is treated as a systemic threat. Operation Epic Fury was not about democracy or nuclear containment. It was about enforcing monetary hegemony and preventing the emergence of an autonomous alternative, particularly one centred on China and the BRICS bloc.

The prevailing system is upheld by a structural interdependence between the world's two principal powers: the United States and China. They are framed as adversaries, yet they function more like rival contractors. The US enforces the monetary architecture through sanctions and military power. China controls the rare earth minerals and processing capacity required for the drones, sensors and smart infrastructure deemed necessary in today's world.

Together, this system extends enclosure and dependency, from fuel and currency to resources and, ultimately, everyday life.

Neither side wants to destroy the system, but the US wants to remain the global hegemon.

As this struggle unfolds, institutions like the UN and the World Economic Forum provide the managerial vocabulary for global enclosure. For instance, under the banner of 'sustainability', agriculture is to be re-coded into a corporate asset class. Farmers are being reframed as 'carbon-sequestering units', and even the smallest family plot is being indexed as either a carbon sink or a systemic risk.

The concepts of environmentalism and ecological stewardship are being subverted to consolidate

Revolutionising the Self

The health of our world depends as much on the evolution of human consciousness as it does on the fertility of the land. True societal change is inseparable from personal transformation, yet modern humanity remains trapped in an egocentric mindset that drives conflict and rivalry. We carry invisible bowls, begging for appreciation and security, approaching life through an ego that creates enemies and division. While we have developed technologically, our psychological evolution remains stuck in patterns of fear, war and ambition. To realise our full potential, we must undergo an inner revolution, abandoning the psychological baggage and societal conditioning that harden our identities. We must recognise how economic systems and ideological institutions 'hail' us into fixed roles, causing us to internalise our own subjection. Genuine change requires us to transcend the illusion of the self and embrace a collective consciousness that recognises our interconnectedness rather than differences. Ultimately, liberating the self demands a return to material conditions based on cooperative labour, fellowship and a restored spiritual connection to the nature that sustains us.

land, data and dependency. However, a world in which people can feed themselves is a world that cannot be easily governed. Whether there is a global hegemon or a multi-polar world, the trend is towards the elimination of decentralised resilience.

The official narrative of nuclear non-proliferation is a convenient distraction. The 2026 attack on Iran is better understood as a strike against the alternative architecture China has been constructing across Eurasia.

Moreover, Iran has long served as China's discounted energy lifeline—a way to fuel its industrial machine outside the dollar-denominated SWIFT system. By targeting the Iranian node, the US is performing a kind of geopolitical bypass surgery on China's energy security.

Operation Epic Fury was a message to Beijing delivered through Tehran: any attempt to build a road outside the sanctioned lanes of the current order can be physically erased.

At the same time, according to investigative journalist Richard Medhurst, what we are seeing is an attempt by the US to secure dominance for its oil and gas firms at home, possibly abandoning or at least loosening its ties to West Asian oil-producing Gulf states while provoking Iran to destroy their oil and gas infrastructure.

Medhurst has a point: control over Iran's oil and gas would match a pattern whereby, through the use of violence, the US has been able to exert financial control or significant leverage over global fossil fuel energy nodes in Venezuela, Libya, Iraq, Syria and Iraq.

As smoke rose over refineries and tankers lay idle in the Strait of Hormuz, the underlying truth became visible: empire and control still operate through force.

And this brings us back to the food system. True agroecology based on the restoration of soil biology and the nitrogen cycle is more than an agricultural practice. It is a form of political refusal (see Chapter 3 here for a discussion on agroecology: what it is and its successes).

A decentralised, self-sufficient food system severs the tether between the farmer, the dollar and the droning mantra of 'smart' agriculture (though only

partially and unevenly in a world still dependent on global supply chains). Its power is biological, local and distributed—everything the current architecture of enclosure is designed to suppress.

In a world being reorganised into energy dependence and corporate dominance, the simple act of growing food outside the system becomes the most subversive act of all.

India's farmers reject black box AI

Enclosure follows the same ruthless grammar whether applied to seeds or soil chemistry. Patented hybrids from Bayer force farmers into yearly purchases, stripping seed sovereignty. The closing of the Strait of Hormuz in April 2026 forced the same reckoning with urea dependency, as West Asian gas proved just as enclosed by just-in-time chains.

Both seeds and fossil fuels convert self-renewing living systems into proprietary inputs bought season after season. As we will see, Nano Urea becomes the seed patent's chemical twin.

The near-total closure of the Strait of Hormuz in March 2026 impacted the Indian agrarian landscape. As 16 million barrels of oil and massive LNG shipments stalled daily, India's domestic urea production plummeted. It was clearer than ever that industrial agriculture is a sub-branch of the petroleum industry.

Having spent decades forcing farmers into dependency on West Asian gas for synthetic nitrogen, the state watched as global urea prices spiked by 20 per cent in a week, underlining what Norman J Church warned in 2005: that vast amounts of oil and gas are the hidden raw materials of every stage of food production—from planting and irrigation to the very construction of the trucks and roads that facilitate the industry. The industrial food supply is basically a system of fossil-fuel conversion.

With the supply chain for granular urea broken by war, the Indian government accelerated the push for Nano Urea. Developed by IFFCO (Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative) as a central pillar of *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* (Self-Reliant India), this liquid fertiliser, sold in 500 ml bottles

containing nitrogen at the nanoscale (20–50 nanometres), is marketed as a miracle of self-reliance.

The claim that a single 500 ml bottle replaces a 45 kg bag of urea is the ultimate ‘technological fix’. But this 'fix' is an optical illusion. A bag of granular urea builds a nutritional reservoir in the soil, but the 500ml Nano Urea is a foliar spray that merely stimulates the plant's leaves (like a caffeine shot), compelling crops to mine the soil's remaining internal reserves to stay green while the earth beneath them is hollowed out.

Soil-based fertility (like compost or legumes) is a permanent asset. A foliar spray is a just-in-time commodity that must be purchased every season. Nano Urea represents a transition from a commodity-based dependency to a proprietary one. Unlike soil and compost, Nano Urea is a controlled, patented substance. It is the Trojan horse of the energy crisis, used to maintain chemical dependency while rebranding it as high-tech efficiency.

The February launch of Bharat-VISTAAR—the AI-powered ‘voice of authority’ personified as the chatbot 'Bharati'—aims to provide real-time, multilingual advisory to 140 million farmers. By integrating with the AgriStack ID system, the state is creating a digital panopticon for farmers.(AgriStack is a centralised digital infrastructure being developed by the Indian government to provide a unified platform for agricultural data, giving farmers unique digital IDs).

Farmers, cut off from traditional urea supplies by the war, were nudged by Bharati towards proprietary specialty chemicals and Nano Urea. To access these ‘benefits’, the farmer must first become visible via AgriStack, surrendering their data and autonomy to an algorithm whose training data remains a corporate secret.

Meanwhile the response from farmers organisations has been firm. The March 2026 Charter of Demands issued by the SKM and the AIKS calls for digital non-cooperation and a refusal to sign up for AgriStack.

The SKM (Samyukta Kisan Morcha) is the umbrella coalition of over 40 Indian farmers' unions. It gained global prominence for leading the 2020–2021 protests against the three farm laws. The AIKS (All India Kisan Sabha) is one of the oldest and largest peasant organisations in India.

Farmers are effectively rejecting digital enclosure. Their demand for a legal audit of Bharat-VISTAAR's training data challenges the technological neutrality of the state and insists that AI, if it is to be used, must promote agroecology rather than corporate dependency.

In the article 'And you thought Greece had a problem' (2015), Norman Pagett says that the age of oil has been a "short flash of light" that briefly lifted us out of the mire. We are now discovering that modern civilisation is a fragile construct of cheap energy. The Gulf states sell oil for food; the UK imports 40 per cent of its diet; India is pushing a 500ml bottle to replace a 45kg bag.

Cheap energy has been used to replace labour in the fields and allows the distance between producer and consumer to be extended. But Pagett notes that the trappings of civilisation have not altered the one rule of existence: if you don't produce food from the earth on a personal basis, your life depends on someone converting sunlight into food on your behalf.

We must acknowledge that an end of the oil age would, in reality, signal the end of the industrial food age and dramatically reshape how we farm. Genuine food security means returning to the democratic control of soil, water and seeds. We must replace the 'black box' of Bharat-VISTAAR with the open-source wisdom of agroecology and localisation.

Here, a 'black box' is a system whereby farmers receive recommendations (use Nano Urea, apply this chemical etc), but they don't know how AI makes decisions, how it was trained and any inherent corporate, political and economic biases. So, the concern is: farmers are being guided by an authority they cannot question or understand.

Moreover, to understand why Nano Urea is a strategic dead-end, we must look at the energy return on investment (EROI). In the conventional Green Revolution model, it takes approximately 10 to 15 calories of fossil fuel energy to produce just 1 calorie of food delivered to the plate. This is a significant energy deficit (see this).

Proponents claim Nano Urea is efficient because it uses less bulk material. However, the EROI tells a different story. The energy required to manufacture nanoparticles is immense (see this). When you add the energy cost of the

Bharat-VISTAAR digital infrastructure (server farms, satellite linkups and AI processing), the energy input per unit of nutrition actually increases.

This is all being branded as part of 'precision agriculture', the alliance of Big Tech and Big Ag that espouses the notion of environmentalism and climate-friendly farming while creating farmer dependency and power-hungry digital infrastructure (see this).

In contrast, a decentralised agroecological system, as championed by the March 2026 Charter, strives for a positive environmental-energy outcome. By using nitrogen-fixing cover crops, farmyard manure and solar-powered local distribution, the energy input is minimal while the biological output is sustained by the sun.

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Chapter Seven

The Soil Whispers

Gleaming office buildings, concrete flyovers and ever-sprawling housing developments and industrial parks, the modern city is increasingly presented as a symbol of progress. But what if this very 'progress' conceals a destructive order? What if the modern city represents the command-centre of an extractive, neoliberal order that has reshaped land, labour and life itself?

If policymakers believe that urbanisation is the natural evolution of a modern nation state, they should stop to consider that it is based on the deliberate outcome of policies that undermine rural self-sufficiency, commodify soil and force agrarian communities into precarity.

Once traditional farming systems have been destabilised by the debt-trap of subsidised loans, structural adjustment policies, corporate input regimes, global supply chains, patented seeds and monocultural production, mass migration to cities becomes an inevitability engineered from above, structured through policy and economic pressures. The city thus absorbs the displaced because the countryside has been systematically stripped of opportunities or carved up for infrastructure or real estate schemes.

From the Netherlands' proposed tristate metropolis to megacities like Delhi, modern urbanisation severs people from soil, memory and community in an inherently anti-ecological drive.

But more than this, the modern urban-industrial system rests on a profound moral and spiritual crisis. Care for land, the value of manual work, intergenerational continuity, local democracy and ecological restraint are values that are fundamentally at odds with the city's organising principles of speed, consumption, the doctrine of land-as-asset, the recasting of the self as consumer and perpetual technocratic and economic expansion.

Capitalist modernity tends to reduce human beings to instruments in a market system, fostering dependency and alienation. Take Bangladesh, for instance, where rural farmers displaced by land grabs for shrimp aquaculture migrated to Dhaka garment factories, enduring 14-hour shifts, factory collapses like Rana Plaza (killing 1,134 in 2013) and wages below subsistence levels amid global fast-fashion demands.

Moreover, urban planning often masks deeper forms of dispossession; think 'urban renewal' drives that evict thousands of informal market traders from prime street locations to make way for malls and luxury developments. Such planning involves increasing surveillance, corporate capture and a technocratic vision of the future, all of which undermine or replace intimate place-based living.

This might seem a bleak assessment. However, certain moral and cultural residues persist 'beneath the flyover, beside the temple' in the form of informal economies, community solidarities and local food traditions that continue to embody an agrarian ethic even within concrete landscapes. We need only look at India's decentralised agriproduce retail markets and elsewhere agro-ecological urbanism in the form of community gardens, rooftop farms and participatory food cooperatives.

These models do not magically overcome the problems discussed, but they show that agrarian ethics can and do infiltrate urban life: stewardship, locality and ecological restraint can be woven into the fabric of urban planning.

These acts of self-sufficiency and mutual care are expressions of the 'art of the impossible': a refusal to submit entirely to the

Decentralised Food Systems

Streetside fruit and vegetable markets are a defining feature of India's urban landscape. Whether sprawling along city arteries or tucked into narrow alleys, these markets play a central role in the daily lives of millions. Their enduring presence reflects not only cultural tradition but also the adaptability and resilience of India's decentralised food systems in the face of rapid urban change. These markets are a cornerstone of the informal economy. More than 10 million street vendors contribute an estimated 14% to India's urban GDP, according to the National Association of Street Vendors of India (2018). The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act 2014 provides legal recognition and protection, explicitly including fruit and vegetable sellers among those entitled to vend from pavements and roadsides. This legal framework is essential for safeguarding livelihoods and supporting local food access.

logic of commodification and a testament to the resilience of an older, place-based moral order.

Such practices represent resistance to the corporatised urban future. They suggest that the agrarian imagination is not confined space but capable of adaptation and capable of surviving in a system that tends to extinguish it.

And there is also the power of the pen (something which we will return to in Chapter 8). Writing about practices, ethics and morality grounded in agrarian philosophy cannot be dismissed as naïve or a daydreamer's utopia; such writing is vital because it preserves conscience and imagination, bears witness to overlooked truths and sustains visions of what ought to be, guiding reflection and action even when the world falls far short.

Farmer, poet and writer Wendell Berry's reflections on stewardship, intergenerational responsibility and the intimate relationships between humans and soil resonate deeply with the practices of community solidarity and local food traditions that persist even within urban landscapes.

Similarly, Gerard Winstanley, writing in the 17th century, envisioned a society in which land and labour were shared as a common good, not commodities to be exploited. His insistence on communal responsibility and ecological justice underscores the radical, enduring potential of agrarian ethics against the logic of extraction and profit.

In this light, the critique of urban-centric development becomes more than an economic critique. It represents a challenge to the very definition of progress. The rejection of the celebratory narrative of neoliberal modernity is a philosophical insistence that a society cannot be judged by its technological prowess while its ecological foundations crumble and its people are alienated from the sources of life.

The modern city, therefore, becomes a battleground where two visions confront one another: the dominant model of corporate-led, centrally

managed growth and the fragile but persistent ethic of stewardship, locality and shared responsibility.

As made clear in The Agrarian Imagination: Development and the Art of the Impossible (here), genuine human development cannot be measured by urban skylines or GDP figures but by the survival of relationships between people, land and community that give meaning to life.

It is the only model that survives when the flash of light of cheap oil fades.

The global frontline

Across the world, people are organising to reclaim public goods and challenge exploitation. At the same time, in fields, urban markets and villages, communities are sustaining and renewing food systems that uphold dignity and connection. In that persistence lies the seed of another kind of future—one grounded not in extraction and control but in solidarity and reciprocity.

The transition from the silent fields of the countryside to the silent streets of our modern cities is not a series of isolated events but a synchronised collapse underpinned by a certain logic. As explained earlier, industrial agriculture has waged a quiet war of attrition against the natural world and the farmer, stripping away ecological diversity in favour of a sterile, controlled system of inputs and outputs.

This same logic—which views insects as threats to yield and soil organisms as sources of

Corporate Consolidation

Small-scale enterprises still feed most of the Indian population. And let's not forget that much of the produce available in these markets, from ash gourd, and pomegranate to beetroot, garlic and baby onions, are valued not just for wholesome nutrition but for their healing properties. The influence of Ayurveda—India's ancient system of holistic medicine—still lingers in food choices. However, the risks associated with corporate consolidation are not unique to India. In the United States, the dominance of companies such as Amazon and Walmart has contributed to the closure of thousands of small stores and the creation of "food deserts" in many communities. The US House Judiciary Committee has documented how these platforms use data and market power to disadvantage smaller competitors. Similar trends are emerging in India, where the expansion of e-commerce giants and large retail chains threatens to homogenise food choices and undermine local food systems.

variability—is now being applied to the human environment. Just as agro-industrial systems treat biodiversity as a design flaw, contemporary urban planning increasingly treats spontaneous human activity as a form of disorder requiring containment.

We are seeing a profound convergence where the architectural erasure of social diversity mirrors the biological desertification of our fields.

For instance, the struggle of Indian farmers against corporate encroachment is far from an isolated local issue; it serves as a foundational front in a burgeoning global resistance against a unified, technocratic system of state-corporate enclosure.

We are currently witnessing a systematic effort to dismantle indigenous rural economies for the benefit of global agribusiness oligopolies. In India, this project acts as a form of recolonisation, aimed at transforming vital food systems into engines of corporate profit at the direct expense of planetary ecology, local community health and economic sovereignty.

While the Green Revolution was once marketed to the world as a humanitarian triumph, it served to integrate nations and farmers into a global capitalist framework rooted in dependency. By mandating chemical-intensive, industrial monocropping, this model contributed to undermining soil health, biodiversity and the autonomy of the farmer.

Through policy frameworks and state-corporate partnerships, such as those involving AgriStack (a centralised digital infrastructure being developed by the Indian government to provide a unified platform for agricultural data, giving farmers unique digital IDs), corporations are moving to consolidate ownership of the data that governs the farm.

Across a range of policy domains—including digital identity systems, biometric registration frameworks and platform-based governance—concerns have been raised by civil society groups, scholars and farmers' movements about the expansion of data infrastructures into everyday life.

While proponents frame these systems in terms of efficiency, inclusion and service delivery, they may also concentrate informational power and reduce

spaces of opacity that historically enabled informal economies and local autonomy to operate.

From this perspective, contemporary struggles over digital ID and agricultural data platforms can be understood as part of a broader debate about the appropriate limits of data-driven governance in democratic and agrarian contexts.

This development can be interpreted as a further stage in the financialisation and datafication of agriculture, in which informational control over farming systems becomes as significant as control over physical inputs. Through emerging state–corporate partnerships and digital agriculture platforms, knowledge traditionally embedded in farmer experience—such as soil conditions, seed selection, and cultivation timing—is increasingly being abstracted into proprietary datasets and algorithmic systems.

Thus, the farmer's role shifts from autonomous decision-maker to data contributor within a managed informational ecosystem, where value is generated not only from production but from continuous data extraction and analysis.

By capturing knowledge, seeds and soil data, these entities reduce the farmer from an independent steward of the land to a mere data-point workhorse who bears all the risks while being managed by proprietary algorithms.

This constitutes the ultimate commodification of agriculture, shifting the purpose of food production from feeding communities to servicing a global financial and technological oligarchy.

The displacement of farmers is not an accidental byproduct of 'efficiency'. It is a core feature of a system that demands constant growth and the expansion of corporate-controlled markets. Just as urban autonomous zones—like those once seen in Amsterdam—were 'cleaned up' to make way for sanitised and monitored environments, rural landscapes are being cleared of small-scale family farms to facilitate corporate consolidation.

The neoliberal agenda, enforced by state policy, creates an environment of debt and financial non-viability that forces farmers off the land, thereby providing cheap labour for urban-industrial expansion while centralising the food supply.

This same logic of enclosure is becoming the primary target for a diverse array of global protests. Whether from a Marxist viewpoint, which identifies the concentration of capital and the systematic alienation of the worker, or an anarchist perspective, which seeks to defend the autonomous space against state-corporate intrusion, these movements are responding to overlapping pressures within a shared system.

From the squatters of 1970s Amsterdam to Indian farmers resisting corporatisation, many protest movements and struggles are based on the same principle: they are all defending autonomy against a system that tends to render life and people into manageable units.

The protests against Digital ID and biometric surveillance represent a struggle against the ultimate digital enclosure, where the body itself is converted into data for state-corporate management. Similarly, the resistance of Dutch farmers against nitrogen emission mandates, or UK farmers challenging inheritance tax policies, should be viewed not as isolated complaints.

Global resistance is capable of challenging this integrated system. When farmers and

Solidarity and Struggle

The fightback against emerging digital authoritarianism is already underway and takes many forms: rights groups are challenging mass surveillance laws and practices in the courts; campaigns are mobilising to block or roll back digital ID schemes, facial recognition and mass data retention. Mass mobilisations against surveillance infrastructure are growing. There is also a burgeoning movement to build and promote peer-to-peer, federated or blockchain-based social networks and communication tools and to develop grassroots internet infrastructure that bypasses state and corporate control. International solidarity is crucial to expose and resist the export of surveillance technologies and the global harmonisation of repressive policies. While resistance to the surveillance state and digital authoritarianism is vital, the deeper struggle is against the concentration of wealth and control in the hands of a global corporate and financial elite. Across the world, workers, peasants and communities are organising through strikes, land occupations, agroecology, seed and food sovereignty movements, debt resistance and the fight to reclaim public goods. The task is to build movements capable not only of resisting but of transforming the structures of economic power that underpin the entire system.

urban activists stand against corporate encroachment, they are asserting a collective right to autonomy.

Agroecology, which has sustained humanity for millennia, provides the blueprint for a post-technocratic future. It is a model based on sacred, reciprocal relationships with the land—the polar opposite of the corporate extraction model that poisons soil, degrades the gut microbiome and alienates us from our nourishment.

By clustering these struggles, we see that the fight is not merely for better policy. It is centred on a manifesto for a future where land and life are public goods, rooted in the collective well-being of the people and the planet, rather than the balance sheets of a few global players and a financially lucrative fake-green agenda—a system of technocratic management.

We must recognise that the silent field of the farmer and the silent street of the urban centre are essentially the same theatre of operations. Both environments are currently being redesigned to function as predictable, controllable units within a globalised corporate architecture. By understanding this common trajectory, activists can move from fragmented, single-issue protests towards a cohesive political front that treats the defence of a local market or a village seed bank as an act of resistance equivalent to disrupting a global logistics hub.

This synthesis of rural and urban struggle requires reframing the ‘efficiency’ demanded by the modern state as the primary mechanism of our collective dispossession. When urban activists challenge Digital ID systems, they are protecting the sanctity of the person against the same data-harvesting logic that converts a farmer’s relationship with their soil into a series of proprietary algorithms.

Both groups are fighting the enclosure of spontaneity and the idea that life is only valid if every aspect of it is measured and owned. By framing their demands around the concept of sovereignty—whether it is food sovereignty, digital sovereignty or the right to an autonomous street life—these movements create a shared lexicon of resistance.

To operationalise this alliance, movements can shift focus from lobbying for policy adjustments to defending the physical and digital infrastructure that

exists outside of state-corporate control. This means urban movements can provide critical mass and logistical support to rural farmers during blockades, while rural movements can anchor the food supply for urban autonomous zones, effectively bypassing corporate-controlled supply chains.

By linking these struggles, the resistance ceases to be a disparate collection of local complaints and becomes a direct confrontation with the totalising system of state-corporate enclosure.

And there are precedents here.

Unity of purpose

It should be noted that urban Indians played a visible role in supporting the 2020–2021 Indian farmers' protest, especially in its early and peak phases. Their support came through a mix of on-the-ground participation, digital activism, material aid and institutional solidarity.

One of the most direct forms of support was physical participation. Students, activists, professionals and middle-class citizens from cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru joined protest sites at the borders of Delhi or organised solidarity demonstrations within cities.

Urban participation also fed into broader actions like the nationwide general strike in November 2020, which saw massive involvement from workers, unions and informal-sector participants alongside farmers.

Urban networks were especially important in logistics and humanitarian support. Volunteers, NGOs, and civil society groups—many urban-based—helped sustain the long encampments by providing food, medical care and supplies. The protest sites effectively became semi-permanent communities with kitchens, libraries, clinics and even schools, supported in part by donations and organisational capacity that often came from urban India and diaspora-linked groups.

Another major area of urban support was digital and media amplification. Urban Indians, from students to journalists, used social media to circulate information, counter government narratives and mobilise solidarity. Viral

images, hashtags and online campaigns helped sustain national and global attention and even triggered international reactions.

There was also institutional and political backing from urban-based groups such as trade unions, student organisations and some political parties. These groups organised *bandhs* (shutdown strikes), solidarity marches and fundraising efforts. In many cases, urban labour movements aligned themselves with farmers, framing the issue as part of a broader struggle over economic policy and workers' rights.

At the same time, it's important to note that urban India was not uniformly supportive. Sections of the urban middle class backed the government's reforms, viewing them as necessary modernisation, and media narratives in cities were often polarised.

Overall, however, urban Indians contributed significantly by helping sustain the protests materially, amplifying them digitally and connecting them to wider political and labour movements.

In Britain, during the UK miners' strike (1984–85), we also saw similar levels of inter-sector support and solidarity. Civil society groups became essential to the survival of mining communities as the strike dragged on without wages. Many families quickly faced poverty and local support networks stepped in to provide food, clothing and basic necessities.

Churches, trade unions and grassroots committees organised donations and set up communal kitchens, while fundraising campaigns spread across Britain and even internationally.

A particularly important role was played by Women Against Pit Closures, whose members coordinated practical support like food distribution and also emerged as prominent political voices. Their activism reshaped traditional roles within mining communities and helped sustain morale as well as material wellbeing.

At the same time, solidarity networks expanded beyond the coalfields. Groups such as Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners built unexpected alliances, raising funds and linking the miners' struggle to wider social justice causes.

Civil society groups also worked to influence public opinion, organising demonstrations and producing their own media to challenge how the strike was portrayed. Some provided legal assistance to arrested picketers or helped families navigate welfare systems, while artists and musicians contributed through benefit events that raised both money and awareness.

Taken together, these efforts helped keep communities functioning under extreme pressure and turned the strike into a broader movement that connected different parts of society, even though it ultimately ended without the miners achieving their goals.

Rather than isolated or sector-specific disputes, many contemporary social movements share overlapping concerns around autonomy, control over resources and the distribution of technological and economic power.

Looking across rural protests, housing movements and digital rights campaigns, what starts to emerge is a loosely connected pattern of resistance to forms of centralisation that reduce local agency. These movements are not identical in their aims or traditions, but they are increasingly shaped by similar pressures such as platform systems, financial consolidation and expanding administrative control.

What links them is a shared experience of systems that favour scale, standardisation and data-led management over local knowledge and lived autonomy.

Seen this way, the struggle involves recognising how similar logics keep appearing across different parts of life, from farming and housing to identity systems and digital infrastructure.

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Chapter Eight

Home Invasion

Take your pick: a multi-storey penthouse or a rural cottage? A place by the sea or a mountain retreat? The very idea of home is wrapped in sentiment, aspiration and fantasy.

Home is supposed to be the welcoming nest, the place of comfort, familiarity and return, the private refuge where one can relax after the day's labour and recover a sense of self. Yet this cosy image has long been cultivated, packaged and sold back to us as part of a wider system of social control and commercial extraction.

Over the years, our perceptions of home have been shaped by planners, designers, advertisers, estate agents, manufacturers, media and markets. Town planners know that spaces become places through their organisation, their use and the meanings imposed upon them.

But houses become homes in another way too: through the emotional and material investment people pour into them. That is precisely why the home has become such a lucrative site for manipulation.

Every perceived need within it can be monetised. Every dream about comfort, security or status can be turned into a product. Carpets, curtains, kitchens, bathrooms, soft furnishings, lighting, patios, smart speakers, security systems, streaming devices—name any area of domestic life and a market has been created to colonise it.

In this sense, the home is no longer merely a place of shelter. It has become a carefully curated consumer environment, a domestic showroom of aspiration. We are told not only how a home should look but what kind of home we should want, where it should be located, what social class it should signal and which technologies it should contain.

A home is increasingly defined less by the people who live in it than by the standards imposed on it from outside. The result is a domesticated imagination: an image of well-being mediated by the market.

That transformation has not happened in isolation. The home, like the city and the countryside, has been caught up in the larger social process described throughout this book: enclosure. The old idea of the home as a stable, separate domain has gradually been dissolved by the same forces that have standardised food, eroded local economies, flattened urban space and converted soil, labour and culture into manageable assets.

The domestic sphere has not escaped the logic of capital. It has been reorganised to serve it.

Homes have also been transformed by technology. Every new device that enters the front door changes what home means and what we do within it. Some technologies genuinely ease labour. Others restructure everyday life in ways that deepen dependence and erode autonomy.

Previous generations had a mangle and clothes rack; the washing machine and tumble-dryer made them obsolete. There was a hearth for coal in the living room; central heating displaced it. Families once made their own entertainment or simply talked. Radio and television altered the rhythm of domestic life, and now the internet has turned the home into a permanent node in global networks of data, commerce and surveillance.

At first glance these changes can seem like progress. But they also reveal something more unsettling: the home was never the sealed sanctuary some might have imagined it to be. The world has always been at the doorstep. What has changed is the intensity of its arrival and the scale of its penetration.

The old distinction between inside and outside, private and public, refuge and exposure, has been steadily weakened. The radio opened the front door to the world. Television widened the breach. The internet has gone further still, making the home porous to endless flows of information, advertising, entertainment, political messaging, tracking and algorithmic influence.

Contested terrain

This is where the problem becomes political. In the classical liberal imagination, the private home was often treated as a space apart from public life, a domain in which one might withdraw from society and cultivate independent thought. But that ideal was always partial and uneven. Homes were never outside ideology, class, gender or power.

Even so, the current situation marks a deeper invasion. The domestic sphere is now a contested terrain in which corporations, platforms and states compete to shape perceptions and habits. The home is where we are continuously addressed, profiled and nudged.

German sociologist Jürgen Habermas argued that public discourse should be open to criticism and rational evaluation. Yet what reaches us through the screens in our homes is a managed environment of persuasion. We are not equal participants in the information systems that enter our living rooms and bedrooms. We are targets.

Politics has relied on marketing, media and image management. As citizens are encouraged to consume opinion rather than form it, passive consensus is manufactured through repetition and spectacle designed for emotional manipulation. The home becomes a site where public life is fed to us in slogans and moods.

This is why the domestic interior matters so much to the logic of power. What happens in the home no longer remains in the home. Our devices connect us to a vast apparatus that predicts behaviour and monetises attention. The promise of convenience masks a deeper surrender.

People give data away voluntarily. They furnish the home with smart products and networked appliances, while corporations learn more about them than their neighbours ever did. The old thief needed a key. The new one only needs our participation.

And so, the home becomes part of a broader architecture of enclosure. People are encouraged to personalise their spaces while being funnelled into standardised consumer categories. They decorate, renovate, stream,

subscribe and upgrade in the name of individuality as the underlying systems become more uniform and more intrusive.

The home appears intimate, but its infrastructure is increasingly externalised, owned elsewhere and controlled remotely. Even the language of freedom is absorbed into the machinery of capture.

The internet has accelerated this process by turning domesticity into a digital identity. People now speak casually of online ‘home’ pages, feeds, profiles and platforms as though these are places where one can dwell. People create web environments that symbolise belonging and identity, often in response to increasing rootlessness and fragmentation. In that sense, creating a place on the web is a kind of homemaking. But it is also a trap.

The more people rely on digital spaces to construct a sense of self, the more their intimate lives become legible to data systems built for extraction. Although the web may look like a personalised extension of home, it is also a surveillance medium and an enclosure of attention.

It all reflects a deeper social condition in which people are uprooted from community and place. When local life and community weaken, the home is asked to do more work. It must provide identity, comfort, entertainment, connection and emotional repair.

At the same time, it is subjected to an endless stream of external messages telling us who to be, how to live, what to buy and what to fear. The domestic sphere is therefore burdened from both sides: expected to be a refuge, while being dismantled as a refuge.

The concept of home also extends far beyond bricks and mortar. Home is a cultural and historical concept, bound up with birthplace, ancestry, language, citizenship, memory and ritual. People carry home with them in ways that cannot be reduced to property ownership or postal address.

Some yearn for a return to a homeland. Some defend a place against occupation. Some are displaced and carry a portable home in language, faith, custom and memory. Some lead nomadic lives and understand home in the broadest possible sense, as relationship rather than residence.

This is why home can become a site of conflict. It becomes a claim by marking belonging and identity. In many parts of the world, struggles over home are struggles over land, nation, religion and survival. From Palestine and Kurdistan to Kashmir and Manipur, the demand for a homeland has been tied to questions of sovereignty, memory and the right to exist on one's own terms.

Religion has often played a central role in this deeper psychology of home. Peter Berger's notion of the sacred canopy reminds us that religion gives people a universe of meaning, a framework that ties personal life to wider social and cosmic order. When such frameworks erode, people can experience a sense of homelessness, not merely in the physical sense but in the mind.

Berger's 'homeless mind' captures the existential disorientation that follows the decline of shared meaning and the rise of individualism, secularisation and fragmentation. In that situation, people search for belonging wherever they can find it.

Resisting homelessness

But the substitutes offered by modernity are thin. Consumer culture promises fulfilment and delivers distraction. Shopping becomes a civil religion of sorts, but it cannot answer the deeper existential questions. Nor can the ideological systems of the twentieth century, however grand their claims. The Soviet Union's symbolic universe did not resolve the human need for ultimate meaning, and the modern marketplace fares no better.

The sacred has not disappeared so much as has been displaced, commodified or replaced by branding and lifestyle. In the absence of rooted meaning, people turn to any number of partial substitutes—nationalism, sectarianism, wellness culture, online community or the endless feed.

This helps explain why home can still exert such powerful emotional force. The search for home is not really the search for a building. It is the search for continuity and belonging in a world that keeps breaking itself apart. That is why migrants, refugees and diasporic communities often recreate home through shared customs, food, language, worship and neighbourhood life.

Italians in New York did not abandon their roots on arrival; they reconstituted them in Little Italy. In London and other British cities, South Asian, Caribbean, African and other communities have built their own forms of continuity, often around religious institutions, shops, rituals and mutual support. Leicester's Diwali celebrations, for example, can be regarded as acts of public belonging.

This also explains why debates about national identity are so often heated and defensive. When in the 1980s UK politician Norman Tebbit once questioned the loyalty of British Asians supporting India or Pakistan in cricket, the issue was never really sport. It was belonging. Who gets to define home? Is it merely the country into which one has moved or does home continue to live in ancestry and inherited attachment?

Such questions cannot be resolved by passports alone. Home is history and memory. It is the accumulated life of generations.

And yet the contemporary world relentlessly weakens these bonds. The homogenised city, the digital platform, the branded shopping environment and the surveillance state all contribute to a condition of placelessness. The apartment block, the gated development, the retail park and the smart home all risk becoming non-places: environments of convenience without intimacy and functionality without rootedness.

This is why the question of home is a question of power. Who controls the conditions under which people live? Who designs the spaces in which attachment forms? Who profits from the emotional labour of domestic life?

Who decides whether home is a place of selfhood, community and continuity or a managed unit of consumption and data extraction? These questions go to the heart of what kind of society we inhabit.

Home, then, is not simply a place we occupy. It can shelter and humanise. But it can also be enclosed or colonised and monitored. The sentimental picture of home as a self-contained haven is increasingly untenable. The world is in the home, and the home is in the world. What matters is whether that connection supports life or reduces it to dependency.

That is why millions still struggle to assert their right to home, in every sense of the word. They are defending memory, belonging, dignity and the possibility of living in a world that is recognisably theirs. Home is where the heart is, yes—but only if it has not already been fenced off, priced out, digitised or given away.

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Chapter Nine

To Be Human

In 1971, John Lennon asked us in the lyrics of a song to imagine a decolonised world without borders. But he did not foresee a future where the only thing left to colonise would be our own humanity.

Lennon's song *Imagine* implied that he was a bit of a dreamer. Today, the 'dream' has become a nightmare of civilisation crisis, a cage of standardisation, designed to strip us of our cultures and our biological autonomy.

Many critiques of the global agrifood system, even those that describe themselves as radical, remain confined within the system's own language: a particular paradigm that is an enclosure of thought and imagination.

They argue about efficiency, sustainability, yields and suchlike. These debates often assume that the underlying framework of industrial development is given and that the task is to optimise outcomes within it.

But what if you refuse this paradigm? What if you expose what is usually kept beyond the bounds of policy debate? What if you argue that the crisis of food and agriculture is not primarily technical, environmental or economic but strikes at the heart of what it means to be human? And what if we ask: what kind of humans are prevailing societal structures producing?

Food systems are not neutral mechanisms for delivering calories. Industrial, corporate-controlled food systems cultivate compliant consumers trained to accept abundance and convenience without knowledge or responsibility.

They produce farmers locked into cycles of debt, dependency and technological obedience, compelled to follow protocols designed elsewhere and measured by metrics they did not choose.

Even resistance is repackaged as ethical consumption: some barcode-scanning app that tells you how 'healthy' a product is or niche markets that leave the underlying logic intact.

Modern agrifood systems exemplify a world governed by Max Weber's notion of instrumental reason. Decisions appear inevitable, justified by science, markets or returns on investment logic. This 'iron cage' is internalised and normalised and results in the type of food we eat daily.

But if Weber described the structural walls of this cage, it was Fyodor Dostoevsky who foresaw the psychological toll of living within it. Dostoevsky wrote of the 'Crystal Palace'—a future of total rationalisation where every human need is calculated and every risk managed. He warned that in such a world, where life is reduced to a mathematical table of efficiency, the individual would eventually rebel. They would do so to assert independence and prove they are still human and not just data points in a master plan.

This is one reason why farmers reject corporate seeds, communities defend land and local foodways and movements insist on food sovereignty. Rather than clinging to the past or acting irrationally, they are asserting freedom and agency in a world that increasingly denies their legitimacy.

The likes of the Gates Foundation and the agrifood conglomerates have spoken of a one-world agriculture; here, a handful of transnational corporations and technocratic institutions will centralise control over seeds, inputs, markets and knowledge. This model prioritises uniformity and profit and imposes a monocultural logic worldwide: a move towards total control of nature and human labour under a global industrial paradigm.

Alongside this, we also see a trend towards the one-world human, a push to standardise humanity itself in terms of culture, tastes, habits, conformity and compliance. In other words, shaping humans to fit the needs of globalised systems.

But it goes much further than this. The tech giants (who are also heavily invested in the food system) have a vision of humans 'enhanced' or 'optimised' by biotechnology, AI or genetic manipulation. This too is designed to produce controllable and 'efficient' beings. It mirrors Weber's

rationalisation but applied to biology and cognition: humans become instruments stripped of their capacity to act freely.

This is a civilisation crisis as cultures surrender their relationship to land, food and community to systems of control. In this light, food sovereignty is more than a political demand: it is a defence of human freedom. It is about the right to connection and choice.

We face a crisis that no amount of technology can remedy. It is not a question of better metrics or smarter technologies.

The answer lies in a recovery of imagination. This involves the capacity to envision forms of life that dominant power structures declare impossible. This is the 'art of the impossible'. And as discussed in the recent open-access book *The Agrarian Imagination: Development and the Art of the Impossible*, it is not some utopian fantasy.

Everyone eats and therefore everyone participates in the order that food systems impose. To question food is to question how we relate to each other and to the land. It also involves how we relate to ourselves.

Do we want to increasingly live within a system imposed from above? Given the choice, most of us would say no. It comes down to whether people have the capacity or even the will in an age of state-corporate propaganda and censorship to recognise the world for the power play it is. Do they want to reclaim the freedom to imagine and enact different ways of being human?

We face a crisis of our very nature that no technical fix can resolve. The question is no longer how we optimise the machine. Do we still have the strength to reject the machine and live on our own terms?

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Chapter Ten

Land of Confusion

The global disruptions we have seen in recent years are frequently presented as a chaotic sequence of events: a ‘pandemic’, inflation, energy shortages and war. Little wonder that most people are confused. However, a more structural analysis might reveal a more controlled demolition of the 20th-century social contract.

We have been witnessing a transition from a productive capitalist model, which required a healthy mass labour force, to what Yanis Varoufakis calls a techno-feudalist order.

An engine of this transition was a desperate financial stabilisation strategy carried out by means of a public health event. As identified by Professor Fabio Vighi, the global financial system reached a point of terminal instability in late 2019, evidenced by the collapse of the US repo market (where banks lend to each other).

By freezing the real economy through lockdowns, central banks performed massive liquidity injections to save the banking-finance tier. If that money had entered a functioning economy, it would have triggered hyper-inflation. By keeping the population at home, the elite performed a stealth bailout that preserved the dominance of the financial class by sacrificing the productive middle class.

However, a geopolitical reset also had to take place. For decades, Germany’s economy relied on three pillars: cheap Russian gas, high-tech exports to China and a US security umbrella. By late 2025, all three had been fractured. As Prof Michael Hudson notes, the ‘sabotage’ of the Nord Stream pipelines was a structural necessity for the Western financial elite.

If Germany continued to integrate with Russia and China, it would have created a power pole independent of the US dollar. The conflict in Ukraine

served a purpose: it resulted in Germany replacing Russian pipeline gas and being forced into a massive build-out of liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure and reliance on LNG from the US. Unlike pipeline gas, LNG must be super-cooled, shipped and re-gasified, a process that is inherently three to four times more expensive.

The result is that, in 2026, German industrial output is at its lowest since the 1990s. Heavy industries like BASF (chemicals) and ThyssenKrupp (steel) are relocating to the US or China. Meanwhile, Germany is pivoting from an industrial giant by betting on creating jobs in the likes of the green energy sector (including becoming a 'hydrogen hub'), semiconductors and microelectronics, robotics and biotech and diverting its capital into a €150 billion annual defence spend.

At the same time, while Germany shows signs of collapse, the City of London thrives on global volatility. Among other things, the City is the global hub for war risk insurance and energy brokerage. When a pipeline is destroyed or a strategically important shipping lane is threatened, the price of war risk insurance triples. The London insurance market (Lloyd's) extracts these 'risk premiums' from the global economy.

The City's brokers treat geopolitical instability as a volatile asset class. Even as British households are crushed by energy bills, the financial centre remains profitable by extracting wealth from the very chaos that foreign policy helps to manufacture.

Moreover, the City of London has secured its position as the indispensable middleman of the transatlantic energy pivot. While the physical gas originates in the US and is consumed in Europe, the financial and legal architecture of this trade is almost entirely managed in London.

Commodity brokers and exchanges like ICE (Intercontinental Exchange) in London have seen record volumes in LNG futures and derivatives. These are financial bets on the future price of gas. As volatility increases, the fees and commissions extracted by London-based traders and clearinghouses skyrocket.

More than 90 per cent of the world's marine insurance, including the specialised, high-premium coverage required for LNG tankers, is

underwritten through Lloyd's. By enforcing strict war risk premiums on any ship entering European waters, London effectively imposes a private tax on every molecule of gas that replaces the lost Russian pipeline supply.

This ensures that while European industry is struggling with high energy costs, the City's financial firms extract a massive toll from the logistics of the replacement supply.

Of course, the structural readjustment of economies leads to huge social tensions. This is where the 'Russian threat' plays a part. It has been elevated to an all-encompassing internal narrative used to manage domestic dissent and to galvanise the public to rally behind the flag. The bogeyman serves a vital psychological function by converting the growing anger of the impoverished into a patriotic duty to endure hardship.

Under this regime of 'permanent emergency', any industrial action, protest or systemic critique can be branded as malign foreign influence or subversion, allowing the state to use new, expansive policing powers to suppress internal friction.

To justify the redirection of billions in tax revenue away from increasing threadbare public services and into the military-industrial complex to create 'growth' in a failing economy (a desperate attempt to revive a collapsing neoliberalism—see chapter two here), the state must maintain a high-decibel level of existential fear. In the UK, the Defence Industrial Strategy 2025 explicitly frames militarisation as an engine for growth, using the spectre of a Russian invasion to legitimise a state-subsidised transfer of wealth to high-tech defence contractors.

By manufacturing a permanent state of war-footing, the elite can ensure that a main pillar of the economy is the one that directly serves the security of the state, while the population is told that their dwindling healthcare and pensions are a necessary sacrifice for national survival.

In this respect, we also see the changing status of the human being. In the industrial era, the state 'subscribed' to the working class, investing in the NHS and education because it required a fit population to drive production. Artificial intelligence, robotics and economic decline increasingly make much of this labour force redundant.

As capital may no longer find the reproduction of labour desirable or profitable, it is reasonable to suggest that the state will withdraw its subscription. The visible rot in the NHS is the result of deliberate divestment. (The UK private health insurance market has surged to a record £8.64 billion, a nearly 14 per cent year-on-year increase.)

If the worker is no longer required for production, the state views healthcare as a 'non-performing cost' to be liquidated.

When a population is no longer an asset but a fiscal liability, the state moves from care to managing exit. It's no accident that we have seen calls for the rapid legalisation of assisted suicide across the West. It might also help to explain the prescribing of midazolam and do not resuscitate orders in care homes during the COVID event. Data shows that the UK government purchased vast quantities of midazolam (two years' worth of stock in just two months) in early 2020.

In 2025, official impact assessments noted that legalising assisted dying would result in "considerable cost savings" for the NHS and state pension system—estimated at up to £18.3 million within a decade for pensions alone. The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill Impact Assessment (May 2025) officially quantified the 'benefits and pensions' impact. It estimated that by year 10, the state would save roughly £27.7 million per year in unpaid pension and benefit payments due to assisted deaths.

By accelerating the 'offboarding' of the non-productive elderly (whatever happened to the COVID era marketing slogan of 'saving granny'?), the system can wipe billions in future pension liabilities off the state balance sheet.

Moving forward, what can we expect? We will see the elite continue to rollout the narrative of permanent emergency under the guise of climate crisis and Russian threat to provide the ideological discipline required to justify a boosted austerity (the media opts for the more benign term of a 'cost of living' crisis). Meanwhile, digital ID and central bank digital currencies will create a system of total surveillance. In this emerging system, the citizen is replaced by the 'managed subject', whose access to the economy is contingent upon a social credit score.

Total enclosure

The structural shocks detailed in this chapter—from the sabotage of energy independence to the calculated divestment from public services—reveal a transition toward a 'final enclosure'. Historically, enclosure was a local act of fencing off common land to create a dependent workforce. Today, it is a global project of fencing off the social contract itself. By liquidating the 'commons' of welfare, pensions and affordable energy, the state has become a manager of extraction.

However, this structural fence is only maintained through the constant application of propaganda. Under a regime of 'permanent emergency', the elite manufactures a state of existential fear by branding the 'Russian threat' or the 'climate crisis' as justifications for the proletarianization or 'flattening' of the population.

This propaganda acts as the psychological wire that enforces the enclosure, ensuring the population remains too disoriented to resist. As the citizen is replaced by the managed subject, the enclosure is internalised: a world where access to life is a privilege granted by the state and where human autonomy is nullified.

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Chapter Eleven

Subverting Happiness

This essay was written in 2013 and predates the formulation of the themes of this book. However, it is included because the enclosure of our fields and the surveillance of our streets do not happen in a vacuum. They are sustained by a certain 'structural fence'—a pervasive, manufactured ideology that equates progress with consumption. It constitutes a manifestation of a specific, narrow and often violent social structure and ideology imposed from above.

To reclaim our lands and our cities, we must recognise and dismantle the architecture that keeps people addicted to the very systems that are stripping away the foundations of our existence.

For thousands of years, people have been writing about happiness. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristippus concluded that happiness lies in the pursuit of external pleasure. Other philosophers, from Antisthenes to Buddha, have stressed that looking inwards and leading an ascetic life based on virtue, simplicity and inner peace is the route to happiness.

And then there are others who seem to think that we can only be occasionally happy in what is essentially a miserable world. The German philosopher Arthur said that all happiness is an illusion and that life oscillates like a pendulum, back and forth between pain and boredom.

Happiness is, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, “a state of well-being and contentment: a pleasurable or satisfying experience.”

For some, happiness runs much deeper than merely being content. Aristotle held that being virtuous was only one aspect of happiness. In the absence of say wealth and intelligence, virtue could only bring about a form of contentment.

But that’s not enough for others. They strive to achieve an ongoing state of bliss, of feeling at one with the universe and everything in it. Through years of meditation, self-reflective practice or consciousness development, they can learn to transcend the illusion of existence and live life on a higher reality. A case of ignoring reality while striving to live out an illusion?

However, let's not get too caught up in cynicism here. Illusion is all around us—both on a personal level and on a wider political level. The type of society we live in has a huge bearing on happiness or well-being. Perhaps Schopenhauer's view is increasingly apt in this age of austerity and war-driven advanced capitalism.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

From Bernays to Albright

Virtually every government in the world creates an illusion for its people. Take economic policy. Government policies might hurt us in the short term, but we are all on a one-way route to the 'promised land' of happiness, or so we are told by the politicians, the corporate media and spokespersons for the ones who make us suffer to ensure they never have to—the privileged elite, the ruling class.

Western governments set out to con ordinary working folk by bringing us war in the name of peace, austerity in order to achieve prosperity and suffering to eventually make us happy. Is there any room for truth? Politicians never like to tell the public the truth. The feel-bad factor is never a vote winner. Best to keep the public in the dark and rely on positive spin. If people knew the truth, they just wouldn't be happy.

And selling the feel-good factor is all pervasive. In this age of irretrievable materialism, the route to happiness is more goods, better goods, newer goods. A never-ending smorgasbord of commodities to be craved for, which will bring us happiness. In league with private corporations, governments have learnt to play on our desires to create a one-dimensional type of happiness based on consumerism.

In part, Edward Bernays is responsible for this. The father of modern public relations and propaganda, he was expert in manipulating human perceptions of pain and pleasure, misery and happiness. Tap into or shape people's desires in a certain way, and you can sell virtually any notion of happiness (or reality), regardless of how bogus it may be.

Whether it was whipping up mass fear in the US about the bogeyman of communism or selling the 'American Dream' of happiness through consuming goods, Bernays and the advertising industry, which took its cue from him, were able to marry misery and happiness together: if you do not buy into consumer capitalism, the alternative will be misery; if you do not buy this or that product, life will be terrible; if you do not join in the celebration of capitalism, those awful Soviets will take over and impose a fundamentally unhappy system of equality on each and every one of us.

Under American capitalism, the lie was that everyone would all live happily ever after because of, not in spite of, gross inequality, massive privileges and disadvantages and exploitation of labour, which all went under the notion of meritocracy and a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

Bernays' propaganda techniques set the stage for con trick of 'liberal democracy'. The US government quickly learned that angels and demons could be manufactured out of thin air and, from Guatemala, Congo and Vietnam to Iraq, wars and destabilisations could be built on packs of lies—lies about evil-doers about to kick down the door, lies about the impending misery they would inflict on the US and on far away countries and lies about the government delivering us from impending doom.

Of course, it is best to arm ourselves to the teeth with nuclear weapons to ensure no one imposes their miserable regimes or awful ways of life on us. And to prevent us all shuddering with the fear of the threat of nuclear Armageddon on a daily basis, it's a case of don't worry, be happy, forget about it and watch TV. Even the very real danger of near-instant annihilation of the species is shoved to one side for the sake of a feel-good culture.

And the best way to instil that feeling is to have us endlessly treading around a wheel in a cage. Millions are locked into the pursuit of the Bernay's model of happiness. They are locked into addiction. Addicted to the pursuit of acquisition, of hedonism, of chasing the dream. Addicted to the belief that there is a point to it all, where happiness is achieved by acquisitive materialism.

But, to paraphrase a sentiment from Buddhism: someone, somewhere, may well be suffering on our behalf for this happiness, this hedonism. There is no 'may be' about it.

So much blood has been spilled by those unfortunate enough to have been born in certain parts of the world on behalf of people in other parts of the world who deem the need to possess resources to be more worthy than the lives destroyed in order to grab them. Recall Madelaine Albright saying the deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children was a price worth paying for furthering the geo-political interests of US corporations. And yes, a drone attack here, some 'collateral damage' there, and those boys in the US control centres are happy with a hard day's killing.

In the US Declaration of Independence, there is the phrase "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Freedom and happiness (or the pursuit of it) is central, albeit built on the misery of others.

'Life', 'liberty' and 'happiness' have become debased. Fed to the masses, happiness has been confused with excessive individualism and the never-ending pursuit of material goods. It became hijacked by the likes of Bernays. With his

knowledge of psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud was his uncle), he knew it was relatively easy to manipulate desires and get people hooked on indulging in certain behaviour, even if ultimately, they don't really want or need those consumer products, those 'false needs', they strive to acquire. Getting them hooked is what really counts.

You have no time to think about the disillusionment because you are all too busy buying the next quick fix for happiness product. It's called retail 'therapy' for good reason. A therapy that has no long-term benefit. It's a feel-bad, feel-good then feel bad again spiral.

But who needs this form of 'happiness', this type of 'liberty', ultimately underpinned by an Albright-esque view of life and death? No one. Yet the masses are encouraged to swallow the lies. The propaganda is pervasive.

Look no further than all those feel-good Hollywood trash films, passed off as 'blockbusters', that gloss over or usually ignore all the mundane, miserable aspects of life in working class 'America'. Little wonder half the world seems to want to live in the US. The need to portray a bogus notion of happiness has served to kick reality into touch. The Hollywood propaganda machine has seen to that.

Crimes against humanity

The great 'American Dream' was built on craving and propaganda. It was built on stripping the environment bare, on the unsustainable raping of nature to fuel profits, perpetual war and misery and suffering. The sociologist C Wright Mills noted the existence of a post-war power elite in the US back in 1956. An integrated power elite of big corporations, the military and the political establishment.

Fast forward and it is responsible for a body count of millions, a statistic, a dirty secret that Hollywood will never tell. Millions slaughtered in US-backed wars and by death squads, covert ops and destabilisations. Drug-running and the exporting of terror and murder, glorified by countless Hollywood icons, commentators and politicians under the banner of championing freedom and democracy.

The system in place exists to benefit not the majority, but small a minority of just 6,000 to 7,000 people. These are the extremely wealthy of the world who have cemented their position on the back of their ancestors and hundreds of years of capitalism. These are the people setting the globalisation and war agendas at the G8, G20, NATO, the World Bank, and the WTO. They are from the highest levels of finance capital and transnational corporations.

These billionaires, this transnational capitalist class, dictate global economic policies and decide on who lives and who dies and which wars are fought and inflicted on which people.

Their crimes against humanity are never mentioned as such. Instead, these people are called ‘wealth creators’. They are the self-anointed role models and captains of industry. The high-flyers who have stolen ordinary people’s wealth, who have stashed it away in tax havens, who have bankrupted economies because of their reckless gambling and greed and who have imposed a form of globalisation that results in devastating destruction and war for those who attempt to remain independent from them, or structurally adjusted violence via privatisation and economic neo-liberalism for millions in countries that have acquiesced.

Little wonder then that attempts to redress the balance, to snatch control away from this criminal class, have been brutally suppressed over the decades. From democratic leftist organisations to any government pursuing a socialist alternative, this class has used intelligence agencies or military might to attempt to subvert or annihilate any opposition.

From El Salvador and Chile to Egypt and India’s tribal belt, ordinary folk across the world have been subjected to policies that have resulted in oppression, poverty and conflict. But this is all passed off by politicians and the corrupt mainstream media as the way things must be. And anyone who stands up to this lie is ridiculed at best or spied upon, tortured and killed at worst in order to prevent the truth from emerging.

And that truth is that many of us know what ‘happiness’ really is, the type of society necessary to establish it—based on communality and economic equality—and that the immensely wealthy people who stand in its way do all things necessary to prevent us from having it. Socialism is not a dirty word.

Various well-being surveys indicate that happier societies invest heavily in health, welfare and education, are more equal and live within the limits imposed by the environment. Many less wealthy countries (and wealthy) do well in such surveys because cultural priority is placed on family and friends, on social capital rather than financial capital, on social equity rather than corporate power. It’s no coincidence that people in places like Britain and the US appear to be less happy than they were 40 years ago (6).

Karl Marx knew that self-actualisation was to be truly achieved in a society that makes it possible for someone to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as he has a mind.

Being ‘happy’ is state of being, a state of worthwhile endeavour freely chosen and not imposed. It is not achieved through the pursuit of an ultimate unattainable elusive goal on a never-ending treadmill of drudgery, a never-ending treadmill of control. Not a fixed end point to be achieved by possessing a hundred latest,

cutting-edge consumer gadgets and indulging in the individualised competition of conspicuous consumption that proclaims, 'look at me, I'm elevated from the crowd'. And by elevating oneself in such a way, the gregarious human animal is cut off from the wider group and may ultimately become rather unhappy.

And yet it is ordinary working-class men (and women) who sign up to join the military and support this system on behalf of these immensely wealthy people. Such people have however always been adept in manipulating the masses to rally around flag and nation, evoking an emotive misplaced sense of patriotism to pursue their militarism or justify their exploitation.

In his book 'A people's History of England', The Marxist academic AL Morton documented how ordinary people, over many hundreds of years, set out to challenge these rulers and often paid with their lives. Nothing ever came for free and ordinary working people fought tooth and nail for any rights that they managed to obtain.

Such a travesty then, that today, ordinary people are denied economic opportunities because this class has sold their jobs to the lowest bidder in India, China or elsewhere. This class and its 'think tanks' were determined to shatter the post-war Keynesian consensus based on a robust welfare state and government intervention in the economy to help secure full employment.

Any notions of 'fairness' and the benefits to be derived from the welfare state were to be substituted for positive notions about the free market and individual responsibility in order to justify the real intention of shifting the balance of power towards elite interests.

With workers' wages having been depressed over a period of decades, demand having thus been propped up by debt and bankers demanding to be bailed out, how convenient that the lie of 'austerity' is being used as a battering ram to finish off what the likes of Reagan and Thatcher did in the 80s with their pro-big business, pro-privatisation, anti-union, anti-welfare policies.

And we are supposed to thank 'them' for this? To vote for 'their' politicians, to join in a media circus to celebrate the birth of another royal parasite, to support their killing in Syria, in Libya, in Afghanistan, in Iraq and elsewhere?

Yes, we are supposed to back them and take in the poisonous lie that 'we are all in it together'. And ordinary young men (and women) are supposed to sign up to fight their wars.

The working classes, the great, great grandchildren of the cannon-fodder 'heroes' sacrificed *en masse* on the blood-soaked battlefields of countless other wars that have gone before can now join up to fight again. For what? Austerity,

powerlessness, imperialism, propping up the US dollar. For whom? Monsanto, Occidental Petroleum, BP, JP Morgan, Black Rock, Boeing and the rest.

The US economy has been hollowed out. Much of manufacturing has been shipped abroad. For those who benefitted, the US can go to hell in a handbasket, and it has. Meanwhile, for them, record profits ensue. It's the ability to maximise profit by shifting capital around the world that matters to them, whether on the back of distorted free trade agreements which open the gates for plunder, or through coercion and militarism, which merely tear them down.

In places like India, it cuts both ways. 'Free' trade and a state enforced militarism that both result in countless deaths and the forced removals of hundreds of thousands of the nation's poorest folk from their lands and villages for the benefit of powerful corporations and a bogus notion of development. "I love my India" well-off ordinary urban dwellers often say. Patriotism has always been a distraction, a tool to be ignited by the oppressors at will among the masses.

As societies become hollowed out, with empty echoes of patriotism ringing out, they increasingly resemble boxes. The only thing inside however is a giant, brutal mechanical hand. There is nothing else apart from it. And it's only function is to pull the lid shut if anyone ever dares to tear it open and shed light into the box. If successful, they will see the immorality, the lies, the hypocrisies. The social control based on the subversion of life, liberty and happiness.

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Chapter Twelve

Reclaiming the Horizon

As has been described in this book, much of ordinary life has already been translated into systems of measurement and classification. However, a certain type of writing stands alone and can be regarded as a form of resistance to this process.

Barbara Harlow (1948–2017) was an influential US academic, activist and literary critic who fundamentally reshaped the study of literature by insisting that writing could be a powerful tool for political change. She is best known for her landmark 1987 book, *Resistance Literature*, which bridged the gap between academic theory and revolutionary struggle. That book analysed texts from occupied Palestine and apartheid South Africa as tools for sovereignty.

The idea of resistance literature (RL) first emerged in contexts shaped by occupation and struggle, where writing was not separate from political life.

However, the common trap in defining RL is to broaden the net until it captures any work of critical thought. If we call Fydor Dostoevsky's psychological depth or Max Weber's sociological critique 'resistance', the term loses its bite.

While Fydor Dostoevsky's depths or Max Weber's observations seed doubt, RL weaponises writing into collective action.

In some cases, writing does not remain at the level of description. It begins to circulate inside movements, shaping how arguments are formed and shared. It has to move beyond critique to become a tactic of mobilisation. While Weber described the iron cage of bureaucracy, he remained an observer. RL is writing that provides the intellectual, moral and evidentiary weight for a movement or, in other words, literature designed to be used.

Harlow's era faced the brute force of colonialism and that issue is still very much relevant today. At the same time, though, resistance faces a more insidious foe: the narrative of inevitability or, simply put, the belief in TINA—*There Is No Alternative*.

Over time, a small number of policy directions begin to be treated as unavoidable. Other options remain, but they stop appearing in serious discussion. Whether in global food systems, digital surveillance or neoliberal policy, the system sustains itself by convincing the public that its current form is the only possible one.

In many disputes, arguments are no longer only about values but about what counts as valid evidence in the first place.

For instance, we can deconstruct the corporate-funded metrics that claim industrial agriculture is the only way to feed the world; RL provides alternative data and examples to show that agroecology can feed the world or that small farms already feed most of it (FAO, 2022). However, corporate narratives attempt to obscure this to enforce TINA.

The most effective way to maintain control is to label any viable, humane alternative as 'impossible'. By documenting the success of small-scale

Political Agroecology

Contrary to the industry-promoted narrative that synthetic pesticides and GMOs are scientific necessities, agroecology offers an evidence-based systems approach that outperforms industrial models in productivity, resilience, and human health. Agroecology replaces external, proprietary inputs (chemicals and patented seeds) with on-farm renewable resources and biological synergies: using nitrogen-fixing plants to fertilise the soil instead of petroleum-based inorganic fertilisers; managing pests by attracting beneficial insects with specific plants; and moving away from monocropping towards diverse cropping patterns that crowd out weeds naturally and ensure nutritional density. A study of 286 projects across 57 countries in the Global South found that agroecological practices increased crop yields by an average of 79%. The 'human soil'—the gut microbiome—is a mirror of the earth's soil. Industrial agriculture degrades both. Chemicals like glyphosate act as chelators, stripping essential minerals) from our systems and disrupting the microbial balance linked to neurological health, immunity, and cognitive development. Agroecology restores this vital microbiological connection between our bodies and our localities. Agroecology puts the control of seeds, land, water, and knowledge back into the hands of local producers, breaking the vicious circle of farmer indebtedness to global agri-capital.

farmers and decentralised food sovereignty movements, we begin to de-colonise the imagination.

Resistance attempts to tear down what is wrong while making visible what is already working, thus stripping the current system of its veneer of inevitability.

Power thrives when people remain silent. Writing preserves the history of the marginalised, ensuring that the official version of reality does not become the *only* version. The purpose of the resistance writer is to act as a chronicler of alternatives. By mapping out a way forward, they make the 'impossible' feel tangible. Ultimately, the purpose of RL is to force a change in the state of the reader who moves from a passive spectator to a participant.

In this light, the act of writing is a refusal to participate in the official narrative and a deliberate contribution to a collective struggle. Whether through the long-form essay or the investigative report, the goal of RL is to transform the reader's perception so profoundly that the status quo no longer feels like a necessity but like a choice that can, and must, be undone.

Corporations and states spend millions to ensure their version of history and reality is the only one with authority.

We can take a very modern example of this in action.

Google prioritises search results through a complex evaluation of E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness and Trustworthiness). Search results are shaped through ranking systems that reward certain kinds of visibility over others. By weighing factors like 'topical authority', original 'information gain' and technical page signals, the system attempts to match user intent with 'high-quality' information.

But Google uses 'authority' as a proxy for market dominance and historical data footprints. By mathematically weighing established credentials and backlink profiles, the system creates a self-reinforcing feedback loop where legacy institutions are perpetually boosted while independent or dissenting voices are buried for lacking 'topical relevance'.

This shift toward 'information gain' and E-E-A-T has in the last few years transformed the previous open web into a curated echo chamber, where the algorithm actively decides whose perspective is 'reputable' enough to be seen. Over time, what appears most often begins to be treated as what is most reliable, even when other material still exists outside the visible range.

Google search engine holds around 90 per cent of the global market (second is Microsoft Bing with 5 per cent). So, it comes as no surprise that many alternative media platforms have been decimated in terms of readership loss and reach and why many are now shouting into a void or an echo chamber. The age of the 'open' internet has ended, and the era of deplatforming and algorithmic censorship is here.

However, these 'dissident' sites can still be found and continue to play a vital role in offering a counter-narrative and providing an archive of literature often stretching back decades. What's more, some have adapted and have moved to platforms that are less censored or uncensored. Despite the difficulties, their voice is still heard.

That is why RL is increasingly important in building a 'counter-archive'. It acts as a mirror to show people that their own intuition (that the system is wrong) is valid

The Art of the Impossible

One peculiar kind of essay depicts a vision of what is right, what could be and what must be, yet it remains out of reach. The *impossible essay* is an act of tragic idealism: the deliberate preservation of an ideal or vision that the author knows can probably never truly be fulfilled. It upholds knowledge, standards and possibilities even though the present has already failed to meet them. It is an essay written for what may never be, but this writing might be one of the most honest and vital acts a writer can engage in. Fyodor Dostoevsky's concept of *underground man* provides a literary parallel to the moral stance of the impossible essay. Underground man is painfully aware that the world will never conform to his ideals, but he refuses to surrender his conscience or the integrity of his reflections. He exemplifies the same tragic awareness that animates writing about a vision for a better world: the recognition that the vision of community, ethical labour and ecological interdependence may be unattainable; however, its preservation remains imperative. Like the impossible essay, underground man bears witness to truths that society ignores or suppresses, asserting the enduring significance of conscience and imagination.

while breaking the fear of being the only one who thinks that way.

The reader stops seeing the world as inevitable and starts seeing it as temporary.

And this is something I can identify with. When I reached my mid-teens, I began to feel something was fundamentally wrong with the world around me but could not quite put my finger on what was wrong or why. Everyone I knew went along with things without question.

It was only through the power of the written word that I began to realise I was not the only one who thought like this. But it was not until a few years later that I began dipping into the work of various critical thinkers. The work of Herbert Marcuse set the wheels in motion for me (more on him in subsequent chapters).

And when I did begin to understand what was wrong and why, people countered by falling back on TINA, claiming that it is all well and good to criticise, but this is life; it is the way things are and the way they have to be. They were trapped in the ignorance and the apathy induced by a system that partly relies on both for its continuation.

At a certain point, reading shifts perception: ideas that once felt isolated begin to appear elsewhere, in different forms, in different places. We start to move beyond mere critique by seeing the evidentiary weight of the counter-narrative that opposes corporate-funded propaganda that seeks to nullify the alternative.

Moreover, by making the 'impossible' feel not just tangible but necessary, the goal is to transform the reader from a spectator of global crises into a participant in a movement for a more humane future.

The aim is to ensure that the status quo is seen for what it is: a choice that can, and must, be undone.

The agrarian imagination

A system does not require constant force if it can establish itself as inevitable. That is how the present order secures compliance. Cities have been redesigned, agriculture reorganised and economies restructured. At the same time, the capacity to think outside these arrangements has been

narrowed. Ways of living that were once stable and self-sustaining are now treated as inefficient or obsolete. alternatives begin to fade from planning, from funding and eventually from language itself.

The condition of TINA signals more than political messaging. It reflects a deeper internalisation of limits or the enclosure of the mind.

Constraints imposed by political policy and state-corporate encroachment and enclosure come to be experienced as common sense to large sections of a population.

But these limits were produced through a specific historical process. Take farming, for instance.

Over several decades, rural economies were restructured under the banner of 'development'. Governments were encouraged or compelled to open markets, reduce support for small farmers and prioritise export-oriented production. Public systems that once stabilised local agriculture were weakened. In many regions, farmers who had produced primarily for local consumption were drawn into global commodity chains or displaced from the land.

It carried the promise of efficiency, growth and modernisation. In practice, it often resulted in dependency. Farmers became reliant on purchased inputs, credit and

Alternative Vision

The agrarian vision is not necessarily a guaranteed blueprint for the future. It can serve as a vital form of moral witness. While structural forces like neoliberal capitalism and industrial agriculture have commodified the land and displaced community-rooted traditions, the ethical truths of agrarianism remain indispensable standards. Writing about what could be but what might never be is a form of tragic idealism; it is a deliberate preservation of values—such as ecological interdependence and ethical labour—that may never be fully realised in a world obsessed with profit and control. Drawing a parallel to Dostoevsky's underground man, this form of writing refuses to surrender its conscience simply because the world fails to meet its ideals. It serves as both a lament for lost futures and a literary gravestone that records what society tends to ignore. By articulating these principles, we can resist the dominant narrative of development and prevent the vocabulary of meaningful alternatives from being erased. Ultimately, describing a world that may never exist is an act of profound hope. It ensures that future generations inherit a repository of moral and ecological truths, asserting that human life is never reducible to mere utility or market data.

volatile markets. Control over seeds, fertilisers and distribution became concentrated in a small number of firms. Decision-making shifted away from the farm and into corporate boardrooms and institutional structures.

The language of development played a central role in this transformation. It defined what counted as advancement and what could be dismissed as backward. Systems that prioritised local autonomy, ecological balance and subsistence were reclassified as underdeveloped. Their displacement was framed as necessary.

This is where the ‘art of the impossible’ operates. Viable alternatives are not always eliminated through direct prohibition. They are rendered invisible or implausible. Through the political clout, funding and lobbying of vested interests, practices that continue to function well are excluded from policy frameworks, ignored in research agendas and marginalised in public discourse. What remains visible is a single model, presented as the only realistic option.

In agriculture, this model is industrial. The field is treated as a production unit. Soil is managed through chemical inputs, and seeds are standardised and protected through intellectual property regimes. Farmers follow prescribed systems shaped by input suppliers, buyers and regulatory standards. Digital technologies extend this process by translating land into data and farming into sequences of optimised decisions.

This approach is justified through a persistent claim: that large-scale, heavily subsidised industrial agriculture is required to feed a growing population. Yet small-scale producers continue to supply a substantial share of the world’s food. In many contexts, they do so with fewer external inputs and with greater resilience to environmental stress.

Hunger and widespread micronutrient malnutrition persists in areas integrated into global markets, where access to food depends on income rather than availability.

The issue is structural. Policy frameworks, trade agreements and financial systems favour scale and standardisation, and research funding is directed towards technologies that reinforce this model. Corporate actors influence both production and distribution, and public institutions often align with

these priorities, whether through subsidies, regulatory systems or development strategies.

Within this system, knowledge is separated from place. It is produced in formal institutions, codified into technical packages and delivered as instruction. Local experience carries less authority, and practices that do not conform to standard models are excluded from recognition.

A different understanding of agriculture continues to exist, though it operates under constraint. Soil is approached as a living system, and fertility is maintained through crop diversity, organic matter and ecological processes. Seeds are selected and adapted over time. Farming decisions are based on observation and accumulated knowledge tied to specific conditions.

This approach produces variation and resilience and does not depend on continuous external inputs. It works within cycles that regenerate.

The contrast between these approaches reflects a broader shift in perception. The dominant perception sees land as a tradeable financial asset. Food is merely a commodity. Agrarian social relations are reorganised through markets. It is a paradigm that enables measurement, pricing and control and which facilitates extraction.

Infrastructure reinforces this direction whereby global supply chains determine production patterns and financial systems shape investment and risk. At the same time, digital platforms extend oversight across production and consumption, and farmers are tied to suppliers and buyers through contracts and debt. And the end-result is ordinary people who encounter food through retail systems that structure ‘choice’ on the supermarket shelf in advance.

And what we see is dependency across both cultivation (seeds, chemicals, cloud-based farming, proprietary knowledge) and post-cultivation (global supply chains, food processing, retail) where distribution depends on logistics, decisions and margins determined by giant agrifood conglomerates.

Ecological strain follows in terms of soil degradation, biodiversity loss and water depletion. These outcomes are consistent with a model that degrades and simplifies ecosystems and relies on continuous intervention to sustain output.

The agrarian imagination works differently. It begins by recognising the inherent value of land and community and works with ecological processes. And it accepts limits to human intervention (agrochemicals, GMOs, intensive monocropping) and adjusts activity accordingly.

This does not require a return to an earlier period. It involves recognising and extending practices that remain in use. Across many regions, small farmers maintain diverse systems of production and local markets continue to operate. Moreover, knowledge is transmitted through learnt practice rather than a model of corporate standardisation.

These systems persist without the level of institutional support granted to industrial models and continue under policy environments that often disadvantage them. Their presence demonstrates that alternatives are not hypothetical.

The struggle over agriculture is therefore also a struggle over how reality is defined. When one model is treated as inevitable, others are excluded from consideration. Similarly, when productivity is measured narrowly, other forms of value are removed from view.

Reclaiming Land and Spirit

Agrarian thought argues that rural life offers a deeper sense of meaning than the iron cage of industrial modernity. Modern systems often reduce land to a machine and labour to a statistic, subjecting every sphere of life to a cold logic of efficiency. This corporate-driven 'development' erases local traditions and weakens agricultural systems rooted in community. Treating life as entirely controllable leads to spiritual alienation. Agrarianism resists this by restoring a moral dimension to labour, where cultivation is a participation in the rhythms of life rather than mere exploitation. Today, this struggle manifests as a fight against technofeudalism, where algorithms and proprietary genetic technologies threaten to further detach people from the soil. Genuine progress is found in movements that prioritise human and ecological values. The Tamil festival of Pongal embodies this through rituals of gratitude, while the Zapatistas and La Via Campesina translate these values into political autonomy and food sovereignty. By combining the historical legacy of the Diggers with modern political agroecology, agrarianism offers a vision of re-enchantment—proving that societal health is ultimately rooted in the health of the soil and the freedom of those who work it.

The agrarian imagination keeps these forms visible by recognising relationships that are not mediated by markets and knowledge that cannot be standardised. It acknowledges forms of autonomy grounded in local control of natural resources like land and seeds.

But this argument extends beyond agriculture to encompass how societies organise provision, how they understand limits and how they define progress. The current system depends on specific configurations of power, maintained through policies and narrative.

Once the narrative is questioned, authority begins to weaken. From that point, rhetoric weakens and alternatives can be practically assessable.

The enclosure of imagination can be reversed.

Change begins with perception and develops through material shifts in how land is used, how food is produced and how communities organise themselves.

The horizon has been narrowed, but it can be widened again.

Escaping the convenience trap

Some might say this harks back to a bygone age and is somewhat Luddite because people like the convenience of modern technology. However, ‘convenience’ is a trap, a siege upon human agency.

AI, apps and smart systems occupy the territory of our autonomy. Breaking this siege does not require a retreat to the Stone Age.

Convenience functions through the elimination of resistance, yet it is precisely within that resistance, or the everyday friction of life, that human character, community and the sacred are formed. When we choose the one-click purchase over a human encounter, we allow a digital logic to harvest a social bond that it otherwise could not enclose.

Resistance begins with reclaiming the mind, which has become the new enclosed common. Refusing the algorithmic ease of AI-generated thought is an act of ‘squatting’ on our own intellectual territory. By establishing sovereign zones in our daily lives where no algorithmic assistance is permitted, we practice a form of cognitive sovereignty.

Just as a farmer saves traditional seeds to avoid dependency on corporate giants like Bayer, the thinker must save and nurture their own thoughts to avoid dependency on a corporate 'seed bank' of pre-packaged processed ideas. This intellectual independence is the foundation for rebuilding the informal infrastructure of our physical world.

We often use the app or AI because the system destroys local alternatives. Choosing to use cash or navigate without a GPS is part of an infrastructure of resistance that keeps the physical 'back lanes' open so that when the digital system becomes too tyrannical or fails, a human path still exists.

Efficiency is the language of the bulldozer—fast, sterile and destructive to complexity. To break the addiction to convenience, we must stop asking how a task can be done faster and start asking who the path connects us to. The modern world makes us time-poor specifically so it can sell us convenience as a cure.

Nowhere is this battle more visible than in the simple act of purchasing. Breaking the habit of online shopping involves reframing the journey to a physical store as an act of territorial reclamation rather than a chore. The 'buy now' button is akin to the ugly concrete flyover that allows us to bypass the world without touching it. We pay with the intimate details of our lives, feeding the digital brain.

Returning to the physical store, particularly with cash, acts as a cloaking device, keeping our lives illegible to the state-corporate apparatus. It treats the journey as minutes reclaimed from a system that previously stole our time through hyper-productivity and sold it back via an app.

By moving from the role of consumer to neighbour, we use that journey to stitch together the social fabric of our communities, building the social capital that e-commerce inherently destroys. This re-engagement with the 'messy' world—the smells, the sounds, the spontaneous conversations—breaks the sensory enclosure of the screen.

To sustain this resistance, we must intentionally design speed bumps into our lives, such as a commitment to finding goods within a two-mile radius before looking at a screen. This is how the enclosure of the imagination can be reversed.

The original Luddites did not hate machines but despised the social relations (wage slavery, loss of independence) that those machines were used to enforce. To be a modern Luddite is to be pro-human agency, distinguishing between appropriate technology that enhances life, like a bicycle, and totalising technology that replaces life, like a self-driving grid.

Ultimately, the Luddite is the true realist, pointing out the hidden invoice of cheap industrial goods and food, from soil death and insect collapse to the destruction of the high street.

This stance is a recognition that parts of life like art, farming and community-building require a slow, human touch to hold meaning. The human being is not full of 'design flaws' to be corrected by an algorithm.

The system removes the local shop, automates the checkout and replaces the librarian with AI. The system creates time poverty specifically so that the only option for survival is the high-speed, frictionless corporate flyover.

People go along to get along because the loss of autonomy happens in increments. A digital ID here, a grocery app there—each step is sold as a 'feature', not a fence. To get along today is to slowly trade your ability to function as a sovereign being for a series of temporary upgrades. You are becoming a 'user' of your own life.

However, while the app is easy today, it builds a world where you have no choice *but* the app. Once the local alternatives are gone, those who control the technology and platforms can set the price, the rules and the social credit for participation.

We don't need everyone to stop going along. If 10 per cent of people keep the local market alive or stick to cash, the infrastructure for a post-enclosure world remains.

The system counts on our exhaustion or apathy to ensure compliance. But every slow walk, every cash transaction, every un-tracked face-to-face conversation says that there are still parts of the world that are not for sale and not for data mining. To refuse the easy path is an everyday form of resistance. It also reminds us we are still autonomous and alive.

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Chapter Thirteen

A Philosophical Toolkit

Dissenting voices have consistently challenged the idea that technological progress is neutral or inevitable. What is presented today as seamless convenience in terms of digital IDs, automated systems, algorithmic governance and so on echoes older processes of enclosure, where autonomy is gradually traded for managed dependence.

To properly interpret the current situation, we may turn to thinkers who anticipated both economic domination and the colonisation of perception, desire and everyday life itself. While many could have been selected, for the sake of brevity, just a handful of figures are presented here. Their views resonate with everything that has been presented in this book. They offer critique as well as ways of seeing through systems that often present themselves as invisible.

Herbert Marcuse: the prophet of one-dimensionality

Marcuse's central contribution lies in his diagnosis of advanced industrial capitalism as uniquely capable of integrating opposition into itself. In works like *One-Dimensional Man*, he argued that capitalism had evolved beyond crude repression. Instead of ruling primarily through force, it increasingly governed through satisfaction by producing comfort, convenience and consumption at such scale that dissent itself became difficult to articulate.

What makes Marcuse especially relevant today is his concept of 'false needs'. These are desires manufactured by the system for status, novelty, entertainment and constant stimulation. They tether people to the very structures that dominate them. The more these needs are fulfilled, the less space remains for imagining alternatives. Freedom becomes redefined as the ability to choose between pre-approved options.

In the digital age, Marcuse's one-dimensionality takes on a new intensity. Algorithmic feeds, frictionless consumption and personalised content ecosystems collapse the horizon of thought. People are not simply controlled but curated.

The danger, for Marcuse, is that pleasure itself becomes a mechanism of pacification. When every discomfort is instantly soothed, the impulse to question the system that generates those discomforts disappears.

To counter this, Marcuse proposed the 'great refusal'—a radical choice to reject the seemingly 'rational' comforts of a consumer society that demands our conformity in exchange for convenience. It is a refusal to participate in the 'business as usual' of a system that thrives on our passive compliance.

In practice, Marcuse saw the Great Refusal in the actions of those who refused to be 'integrated'—from the poets who rejected the simplified language of the media to the outsiders who rejected the false needs of consumer comfort. It is the refusal to accept the system's definition of what is 'rational' or 'necessary'.

For the farmer or the urban dweller, the Great Refusal is the act of preserving an authentic, unmanaged space—the seed and the lane—that the system has not yet been able to flatten into a commodity. Marcuse's enduring warning remains: a society that appears to give everything is, in fact, taking away the very capacity to want something different.

Paulo Freire: building critical consciousness

While Marcuse diagnosed the 'one-dimensional man', Paulo Freire provided the methodology to shatter that dimension. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that domination is maintained through the internalisation of the oppressor, primarily via the 'banking model' of education. This model treats individuals as empty vessels for 'official knowledge', transforming people into passive objects stripped of creative power.

Today, these 'deposits' persist through curated feeds and notifications that dictate our values. and when we passively consume these inputs, we lose the capacity to define reality for ourselves.

Freire insisted that our situation is neither determined nor unalterable. He envisioned education as a means for individuals to analyse their relationship with social reality, replacing submission and TINA (the belief that there is no alternative) with a critical attitude designed to transform the world.

To counter passivity, Freire proposed 'critical consciousness', synthesising reflection and action. Ultimately, he argued that true liberation is not a gift bestowed by the system but a 'painful childbirth' achieved through collective struggle and the active reclaiming of agency.

Rick Roderick: the analyst of banal modernity

Rick Roderick had the ability to translate complex philosophical traditions into lived experience. Through his lectures, particularly *The Self Under Siege,* he unpacked how modern systems of power operate through the quiet, cumulative erosion of agency.

Roderick emphasised that late modernity does not feel oppressive in an obvious way. Instead, it feels normal. People go to work, consume media, scroll through curated realities and participate in systems they barely perceive. This is what makes it dangerous: domination becomes indistinguishable from everyday life.

He particularly focused on the role of fatigue and distraction. A population that is overstimulated yet exhausted is unlikely to mount meaningful resistance. The spectacle does not need to convince you of its truth; it only needs to keep you occupied. In this sense, boredom and busyness become political tools.

Roderick also pushed back against the idea that there is no alternative (the TINA doctrine). For him, this belief is an ideological achievement. It is produced through repetition, media framing and the narrowing of intellectual horizons. His work invites a simple but radical shift from passive acceptance to active interpretation.

To see clearly, in Roderick's framework, is already to resist.

Guy Debord: the cartographer of the spectacle

Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* remains one of the most incisive accounts of mediated reality. Building on Marx's idea of commodity fetishism, Debord argued that capitalism had moved beyond the production of goods into the production of images. Social life itself becomes a representation—something to be watched, consumed and imitated.

The 'spectacle' is not just media or advertising; it is a total environment where authentic experience is replaced by its simulation. Relationships become performances, places become brands and identity becomes a curated display. In such a world, participation is replaced by observation. People no longer live directly because they encounter life as spectators.

In today's platform-driven environment, Debord's insights feel almost prophetic. Social media feeds, influencer culture and algorithmic visibility systems create a continuous loop of representation. The value of an experience is increasingly tied to its ability to be captured and shared, rather than lived.

Debord's proposed countermeasure, the *dérive*, is deceptively simple but philosophically profound. By drifting through space without purpose and rejecting the prescribed pathways of urban planning or algorithmic suggestion, people actively disrupt the logic of control. The dérive is not just a simple walk but a refusal to be positioned.

More broadly, Debord calls for a shift from passive spectatorship to active creation. The goal is to reclaim lived *experience* from its representations.

Ivan Illich: the architect of conviviality

Ivan Illich's work is basically grounded in a simple question: When do tools or institutions stop serving humans and start shaping them*?* His answer is based on the concept of radical monopoly, where institutions or technologies become so dominant that alternatives are rendered unviable.

In *Tools for Conviviality*, Illich shows how systems like industrial schooling, healthcare and transportation have evolved into structures that disempower by making individuals dependent. Once a system becomes unavoidable or compulsory, participation is no longer a choice but a condition of survival.

Illich's critique is especially relevant in an era of digital infrastructures. When access to basic services like banking is mediated through centralised platforms, autonomy is quietly eroded. The issue is then dependency without exit.

His alternative is conviviality. Convivial tools are those that individuals and communities can understand, modify and control. They enhance autonomy and are embedded in everyday relationships.

Illich's vision points toward a different kind of progress where people remain authors of their own lives.

James C Scott: the defender of the illegible

James C Scott provides the historical and anthropological backbone to these critiques. In works like *Seeing Like a State*, he examines how states and large institutions attempt to make societies legible, in other words, measurable, standardised and predictable.

From agricultural grids to digital databases, these systems of legibility tend to simplify complexity so that it can be governed and exploited. However, in the process, they often destroy the very practices that sustain life at a local level.

Scott contrasts this with *mētis*, a form of practical, experiential knowledge rooted in context. Mētis cannot be easily codified or scaled. It exists in the intuition of farmers, the improvisation of street vendors and the informal networks of communities. It is adaptive, flexible and often invisible to formal systems.

What Scott makes clear is that illegibility is a form of protection. Spaces that resist standardisation are harder to control, but they are also more resilient. Informal economies, local traditions and unregulated interactions often sustain people precisely because they operate outside rigid frameworks.

Shoshana Zuboff: the analyst of digital dispossession

If Marcuse saw the enclosure of desire, Shoshana Zuboff maps the enclosure of human experience itself. In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, she argues that we are witnessing a new kind of asset: behavioural surplus. Just as industrial capitalism claimed the natural world (land and labour) as

free raw material for production, surveillance capitalism claims our private experience—our morning runs, our text messages, our speculative searches—as raw material for translation into behavioural data.

Zuboff argues that the dispossession of experience is the modern land grab. Tech giants have unilaterally declared that our private lives are theirs for the taking. When an algorithm predicts your next purchase, it is usurping your agency.

Unlike totalitarian power, which uses terror to compel behaviour, the digital iron cage doesn't care what you believe; it only cares that you are 'legible' and predictable. It operates as a ubiquitous digital architecture that 'tunes' and 'nudges' behaviour towards maximum profit for others.

Zuboff reminds us that 'convenience' is often the Trojan horse for dispossession. Resistance, in her view, begins by asserting that our internal lives are not for sale and refusing the 'inevitability' of a world where every action must be captured, datafied and traded.

Bhaskar Save: the architect of natural resistance

While James C Scott provides the historical framework for 'illegibility', Bhaskar Save offers its most potent practical application. Known as the 'Gandhi of Natural Farming', Save recognised that the transformation of the rural landscape was not an accident of 'progress'. It was a prerequisite for the modern urban state.

He argued that for industrial urbanisation to succeed, the countryside had to be 'flattened' by stripping it of self-sufficiency and converting into a captive market for corporate inputs. To Save, the Green Revolution was far from an agricultural achievement; it merely traded the farmer's autonomy for a state of managed dependency.

Save's toolkit for resistance is rooted in a refusal of external authority. By proving that a farm could thrive through natural regeneration rather than chemical intervention, he moved beyond mere protest into the realm of active sovereignty.

His resistance was biological: a farm that saves its own seeds and generates its own fertility is a farm that remains invisible to the global agri-cartel. If the corporation cannot sell you the input, it cannot dictate your output.

Save proved that rural self-reliance is the only true check on the totalising power of an urban-industrial centre and reminds us that the ‘flavour of the cheese’ and the ‘freedom of the lane’ both depend on our ability to exist outside the scripts of corporate management.

Taken together, these thinkers reveal a consistent pattern: systems of power evolve by becoming less visible, more integrated and more dependent on participation, rather than coercion, to the point they are internalised by the population as natural and just ‘common sense’.

On one level, there is the enclosure of land, seeds and urban spaces where it becomes accepted that private entities have some perceived ‘natural’ right to own and control such things. On another level, there is also the enclosure of attention, identity and social life itself that reinforces perceptions of what is ‘normal’.

Marcuse shows how desire is shaped, and Roderick reveals how normality conceals domination. Where Debord exposes the mediation of reality, Illich redefines the relationship between humans and their institutions. Freire provides the methodology for dismantling the ‘internalised oppressor,’ just as Scott defends the spaces that remain beyond control. Finally, Save provides the blueprint for defending the seed and the soil from corporate flattening.

The struggle described is political, economic and perceptual. It is about reclaiming the ability to see, to imagine and to act outside the scripts imposed from above. And each generation must struggle to reimagine and reclaim.

But today, there is an increasing sense of urgency. Power is becoming ever more centralised and consolidated and technological systems of control are becoming more sophisticated and all encompassing.

And that, more than anything, is why widespread awareness and collective resistance is required.

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Chapter Fourteen

Reclaiming Sovereignty

The digital order works by turning convenience into fate. First, it offers speed. Then it offers ease. Then it makes those things feel indispensable. Before long, dependence passes for common sense. The environment reshapes the inhabitant until the habitat feels like the only reality.

The answer lies in practice. Not just in saying ‘no’ but in building a parallel way of living, already visible in fragments across allotments, co-ops, farms, kitchens, village halls and local markets. It is already being lived, quietly, where people still grow, share, repair and eat outside the scripts of the supermarket and the platform.

This final chapter asks: What are we already doing that proves another life can be built?

Ivan Illich argued that tools must serve people. In Britain, allotments still carry that truth in the soil. They are working places of sovereignty where people grow, save, compost, swap and learn in public, with the knowledge shared by word of mouth.

That same spirit lives in seed swaps and seed libraries, where open-pollinated seed stays in circulation and the power to reproduce food stays with the people growing it. It lives in places like Transition Town Totnes, where local food projects, seed exchange and community growing have been used to build resilience from the ground up.

And it exists in Suma, the Yorkshire co-op that has spent decades showing food distribution does not need supermarket logic.

Beyond the UK, the same principle appears in initiatives like Seed Savers Network in Kenya, which connects tens of thousands of small-scale farmers through community seed banks and kitchen gardens, keeping drought-resilient and culturally significant varieties in circulation. In Peru’s

Camino Verde, local tree and agro-forest seed banks support indigenous knowledge and multi-species systems that resist mono-cropping and genetic patents. In Greece's Agroecopolis network, urban and peri-urban farms produce food through collectively managed land and direct distribution to neighbours.

A convivial tool is one people can use and understand together. A village kitchen, a local mill, a community bakery or a shared seed store represent a freer way of living.

James C Scott knew what the state and the corporation hate: people who cannot be fully mapped. Cash still matters for that reason. In farmers' markets, village shops, roadside stalls and small-town exchanges, cash keeps trade direct and local. It lets small producers and small buyers deal with one another without every movement being turned into data for someone else's profit or control.

Illegibility also lives in paper. Parish records, handwritten recipe books, allotment notebooks, printed newsletters, local history files and village noticeboards carry real value because they sit outside the server farm. Digital platforms can be edited, deleted or deplatformed overnight. Paper makes things harder to erase or control and easier to pass on.

Around the world, informal exchange networks sustain entire communities precisely because they resist full legibility. Mutual-aid economies like Venezuelan *trueque* networks and Mexican community-run food exchanges ensure goods circulate through trust rather than traceable accounts.

In repair cafés across 24 countries, from Canada to India, Germany and Brazil, volunteers fix and share tools without producing a controlled data trail.

Allotments show this plainly. Seed, advice, timing, pest control and taste are exchanged informally, often more reliably than any official system could manage. There is power in this autonomy. It is a quiet, everyday refusal of total legibility, a form of defence that (on the surface) does not look like resistance.

Participation over spectatorship

Debord wrote about the Spectacle, where people are trained to watch life instead of live it. The answer is to make situations that pull people back into direct participation.

Community supported agriculture (CSA) does exactly that. Farms like Tablehurst in Sussex and Stroud Community Agriculture in Gloucestershire have built direct relationships between growers and eaters. People get involved, share the risk and view food as part of a living relationship rather than a shelf transaction. The chain is short, personal and seasonal.

In Switzerland's Solawi (solidarity agriculture) networks, households pre-fund farms and accept seasonal risk. In Italy's Arvaia CSA in Bologna, hundreds of members participate directly in planning, labour and decision-making.

In New Zealand's CSAs, small farms use subscription models to reconnect urban dwellers with rural production, treating food as a long-term partnership rather than a one-off purchase.

In Greece, Ireland and Romania, community-supported farms operate through local hubs that distribute produce to schools, clinics and neighbourhood groups, embedding food into the fabric of everyday institutions.

The same thing happens in buying groups, food co-ops, farmers' markets, and neighbourhood veg box schemes. You stop being a customer and start becoming part of a food culture.

Even the simple act of walking through a town without being driven by GPS is a small refusal of flattening. You start to know a place again through smell, sound and encounters.

This is what a constructed situation looks like in real life. It moves beyond theory because it is lived.

A parallel system does not need a majority to survive. It only needs enough committed people to make it real. That is the lesson of the 10 per cent

infrastructure: a modest but dense population base can keep ‘the lane’ open while the larger system keeps pretending nothing is changing.

We see it in the British transition movement, beginning in Totnes, where food growing, local exchange, repair and energy reduction have been treated as practical forms of resilience. We see it in repair cafés and tool libraries, where people rebuild competence by fixing what the market wants to throw away. We see it in community-owned shops, pubs and bakehouses, where locals keep essential institutions alive.

In Buffalo, New York, the Tool Library lends thousands of tools to individuals and small organisations, organising repair cafés and community projects that cut waste and dependence on consumer cycles.

In the Netherlands and Germany, the Repair Café Foundation supports hundreds of local repair events, turning broken objects into occasions for skills-sharing rather than disposal. In Japan’s *mottainai* repair and reuse networks, communities repair clothes, electronics and household items through collective workshops, refusing the single-use logic of mass production.

At the biological level, the same principle holds. Heritage breeds, raw dairy, ferments, old seed lines and traditional processing keep life tied to soil and microbial diversity. These are living refusals of standardisation.

In Kenya’s indigenous seed-saving communities, Peruvian small-scale potato keepers and Indian millet-growing collectives, people maintain open-pollinated landraces that the corporate world has no interest in cataloguing or controlling.

In Bhaskar Save’s natural-farming, seed and fertility are generated on-site, the farm is largely invisible to the global agri-cartel.

The sovereign lane grows through one plot, one swap, one market stall, one repaired tool, one shared meal, one cash purchase and one local network at a time.

There is a different reality in plain view, built from the ground up.

The emerging order promises ‘convenience’ to eliminate the friction of existence while incarcerating us in a digital open prison. It predicts our

movements and simplifies our choices so that we are users of a pre-scripted reality. All the time, we are monitored, to be controlled and manipulated.

As we have seen in this concluding chapter, the response to this is not found in the grand gestures of political theory. It is taking place quietly on the allotment, in the repair café or through the seed swap.

Some might dismiss these efforts as minor—a hobbyist's retreat that fails to challenge power where it truly resides. However, this is a failure of vision. These acts are the essential practice of a different imagination. Moreover, if we look at (political) agroecology, we can see genuine mass-movement pushback against prevailing power across the world, from Mexico and Ethiopia to India and beyond.

But first, Herbert Marcuse revealed that the path to liberation must pass through the aesthetic dimension. Marcuse saw the necessity of a 'New Sensibility', a profound reorientation of our instincts, as the only way to break the monopoly of a system that commodifies all aspects of life and nature.

As discussed in Chapter 11, there is where the artist and the writer come in. For Marcuse, they are more than reporters of the status quo. He regarded them as agents of 'estrangement'. Through their work, they strip away the veneer to reveal the underlying mechanisms of our confinement. They force us to see the world as it is. They help us to imagine different possibilities.

So, when we tend to the soil, when we save an open-pollinated seed or when we do a cash transaction, we are refusing to be users of a one-dimensional pre-determined reality. We are composing a life that the system cannot categorise, predict or colonise.

The system relies on our exhaustion, on our quiet surrender to the belief that the frictionless path is the only one available. But by building parallel infrastructures, we prove that the 'impossible' is already here. We are not just tending gardens or fixing old tools but are rebuilding the capacity to perceive the world for ourselves.

Through thought and practice, we are widening horizons that prevailing power structures seek to close.

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